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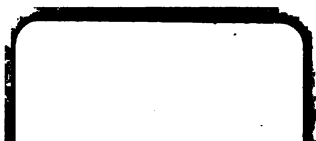
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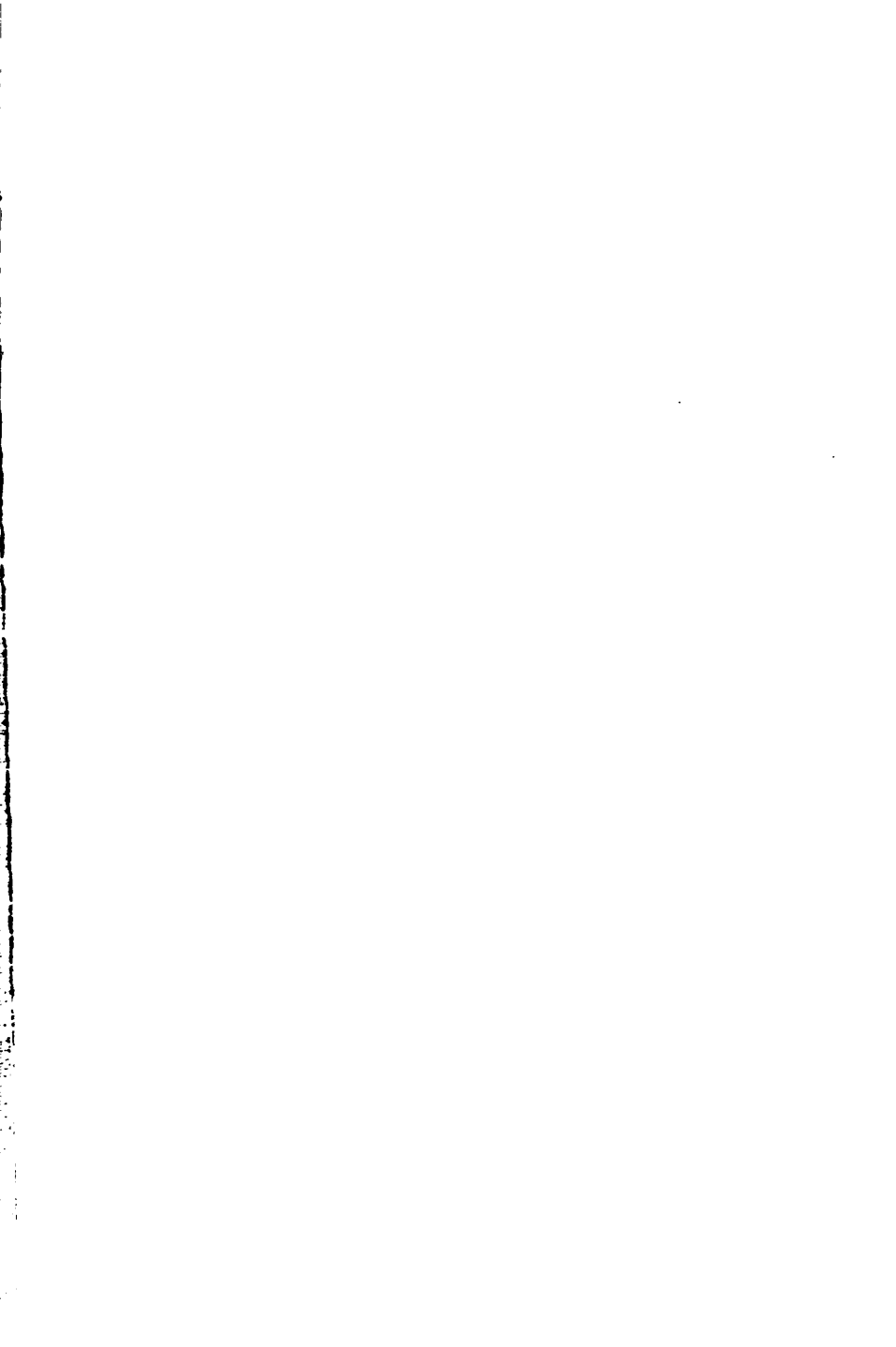
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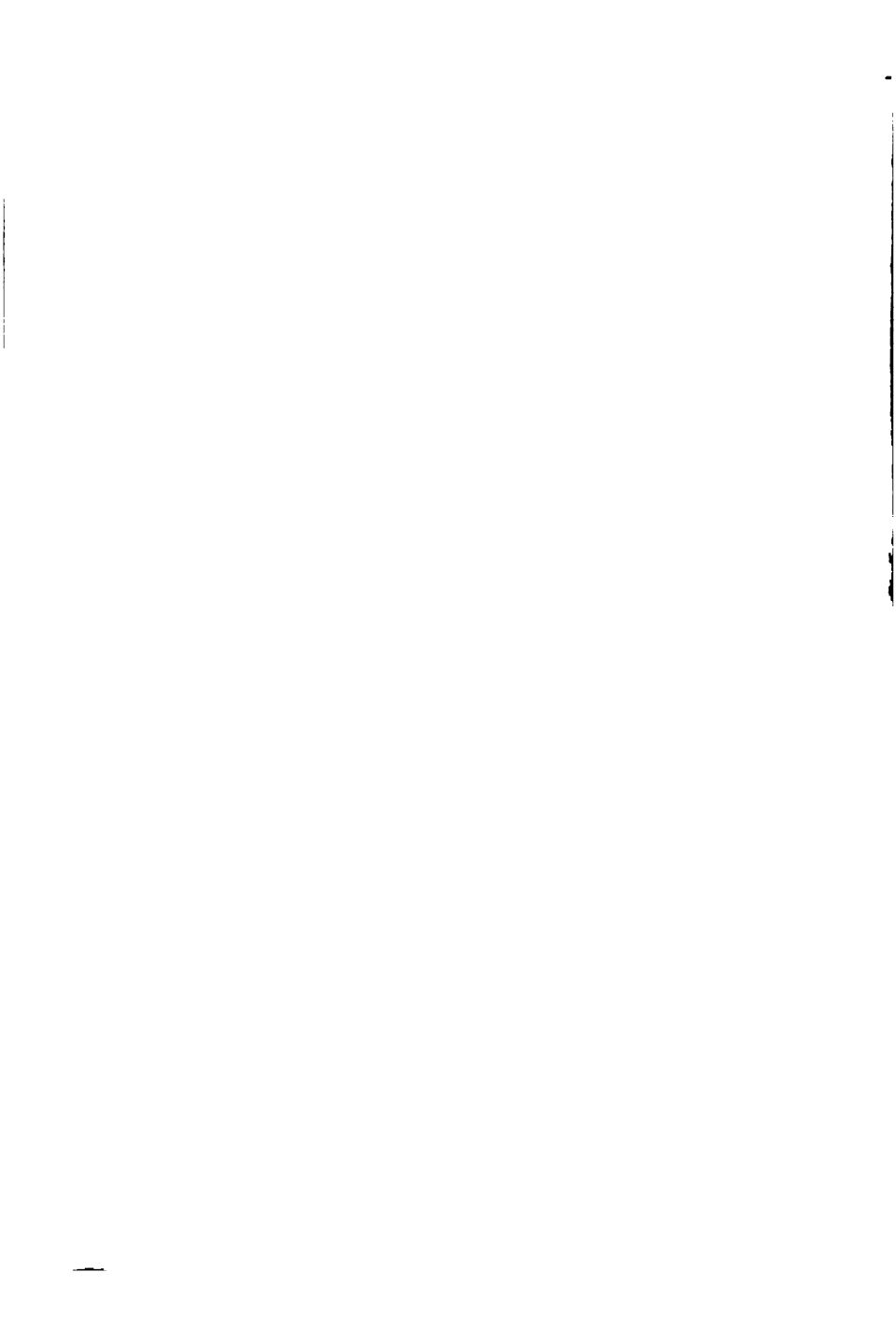
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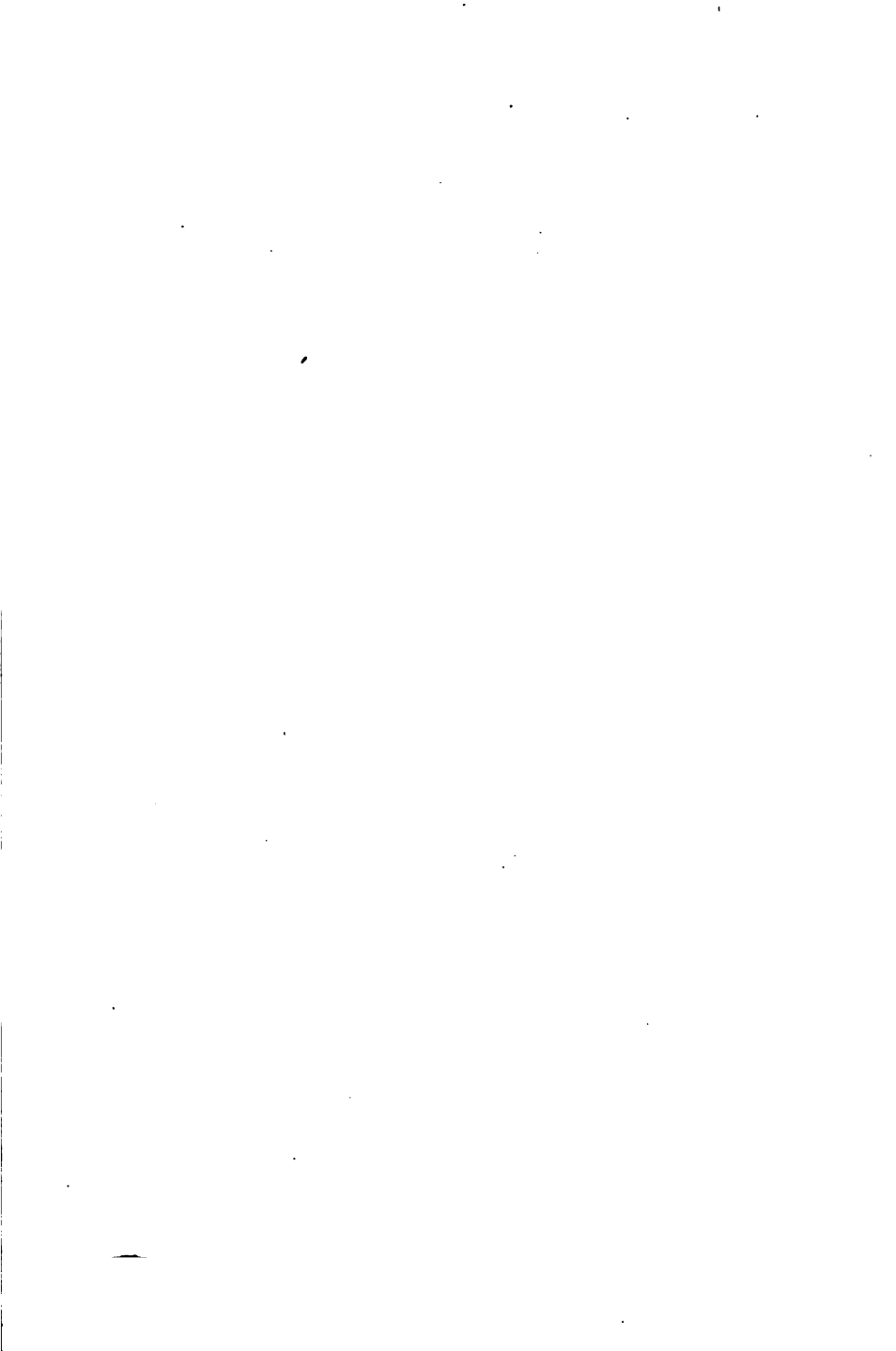








# **BIG GAME AT SEA**









Playing a Swordfish. Santa Catalina Islands.

*(See Chapter VI)*

BY

CHARLES FREDERICK HOLDER

Author of "The Life of Sir Arthur  
W. H. Hall, Bart., etc.

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK

THE OUTING PUBLISHING COMPANY

MCMXXII



# BIG GAME AT SEA

BY

CHARLES FREDERICK HOLDER

Author of "The Log of a Sea Angler,"  
"Life of Charles Darwin," etc.

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS



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## PREFACE

THESE stories are mainly the author's experiences with big game at sea in many waters. Fifty years ago graining the big ray or devil-fish was the sport of sports along the Carolinas, and it is being revived by men who like a dash of spice with their pastimes. The big ray is now taken nearly every season on the gulf coast of Florida, and at Aransas Pass, where an extraordinary contest took place in 1906: a ray swimming off with fourteen boats before it was killed. Yet the "Giant Ray Club," suggested last year, to be composed of men who have taken the huge fish, produced less than a dozen men who had accomplished the feat, though doubtless a more extended canvass would develop others. The various rod catches herein described illustrate the work accomplished by the Tuna and other clubs for a higher standard of sport, as on the Pacific slope. At Santa Catalina especially, game fishes up to one hundred pounds are now taken with what is known as a number nine-thread line; the tip of the rod not less than five feet long, and weighing not over six ounces, while the members of the Tuna Club have for years taken all their great record fishes on twenty-one-thread lines; the idea being to give all large fishes the advantage and reduce the catch to the limit of actual size. In the

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W. H. C. Williams

## *Preface*

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nine years' history of the Tuna Club but sixty-five men have landed, single-handed, with a sixteen-ounce rod and not over twenty-four-thread line, leaping tunas of one hundred pounds weight. In that time, with a big handline, it would have been possible to kill thousands of these fishes. These chapters, then, may be considered in a sense a plea for light tackle for all the big game of the sea, as illustrated by the methods of the Tuna and other clubs of Southern California, where the nine-thread line and six-ounce tip for all game up to one hundred pounds is now the slogan.

The chapter, "The Biography of the Man-eater," is of course imaginary as a whole, but is based on the author's observations and capture of scores of sharks of various kinds, and all the individual incidents in the recital are based on actual happenings. In other words, the story is a composite, and the not impossible life history of one of the huge white sharks, which attain a length of twenty or thirty feet, and roam the warm waters of tropical and subtropical seas. I might add that I have taken not once, but many times, nearly every shark in American waters, in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific; have watched them in all ages and conditions, and the article is the result of many observations; hence is not what really happens to one shark, but what *might* happen to any lusty man-eater.

The swordfish has been admitted to the ranks of game fishes in Southern California, and several more or less desperate bouts with these fishes have occurred.



## Preface

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The Tuna Club record is 165 pounds, with rod and reel. Certain boatmen last season felt it incumbent to cut away from this uncertain game, and this season the Tuna Club offers a loving cup for the largest catch and for the angler who does not retreat before the supposed charge of the swordsman of the sea. In imagination we see future anglers for the game going out in armor.

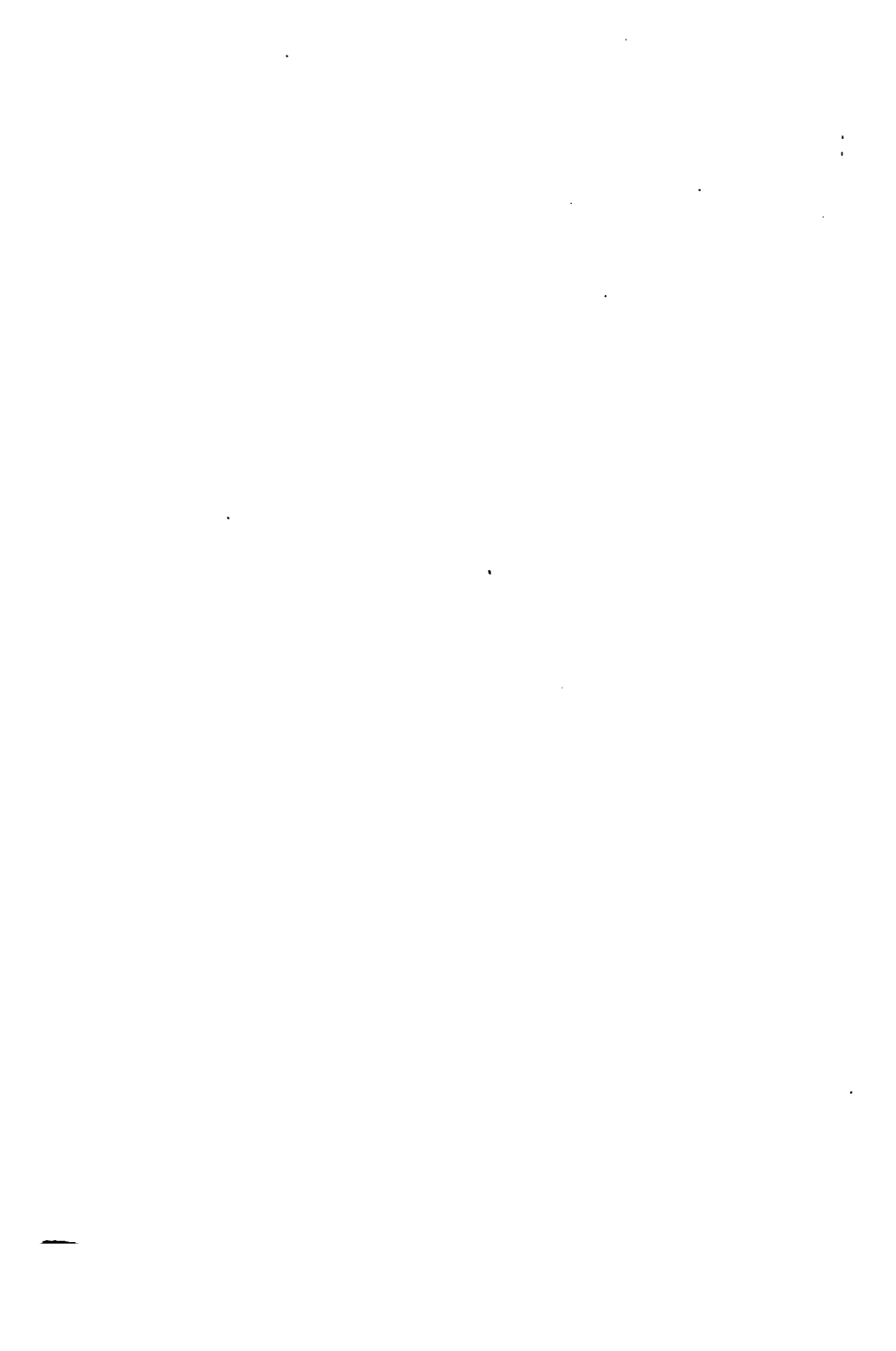
In the chapter on a new game fish is described what Dr. Jordan said to the author, "was a new link between America and Japan." This splendid game fish—the yellow-fin tuna—appeared suddenly and for the first time in American waters in 1905, and has afforded marvelous sport at the channel island during August and September ever since, over five hundred being taken with rod and reel. But a few years ago all large fishes were taken with handlines. Now the rod is in evidence, and at Santa Catalina during the present month a 250-pound black sea bass was taken on a number-nine line and a nine-ounce rod, typifying the fact that fair play for all game is the motto among gentlemen anglers everywhere. The following chapters have appeared in various magazines in this country and in England—in *The Outing Magazine*, *Recreation*, *Metropolitan*, *Outlook*, *Badminton*, *Forest and Stream*, *McClure's*, *The London Field*, *Cosmopolitan*, etc.

C. F. H.



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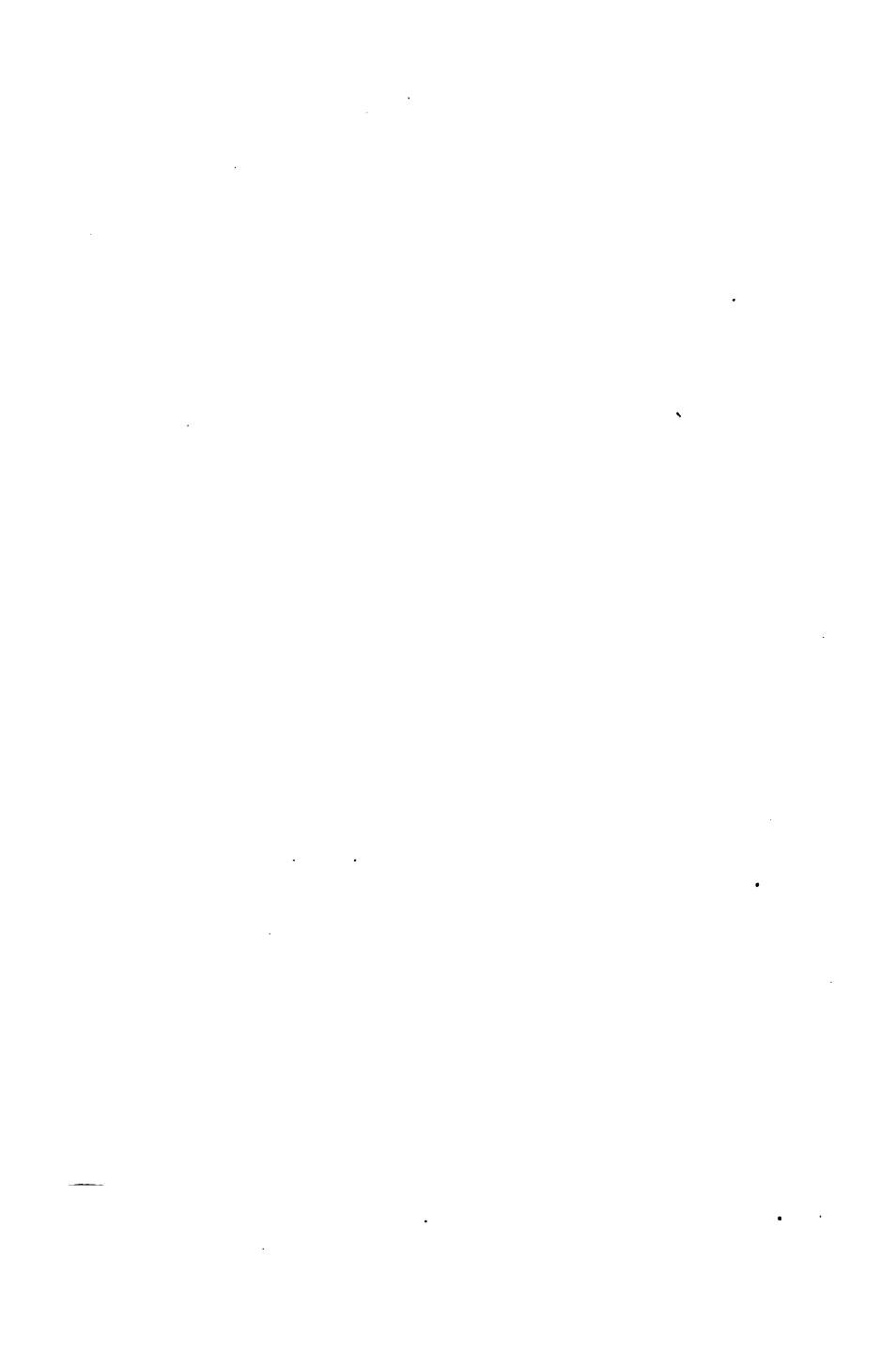
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# **BIG GAME AT SEA**



# BIG GAME AT SEA

## CHAPTER I

### TRAILING THE SEA-BAT

**T**HE outer Florida reef, where the army of coral polyps has made its last stand against the Gulf Stream, was lying on the surface of what seemed a sea of molten steel. The wind was dead, and the blue expanse of the gulf had that strange oily appearance so often a characteristic of a dead calm in the tropics. In the west vermilion-tipped clouds—mountains of the air—rose high in the heavens, casting deep shadows over the green-topped creations of the wind, hurricane, or the prevailing tides. The keys appeared to be formed without rhyme or reason, but in reality Nature could not have ordered better, as with their outlying banks and reefs they constitute a perfect harbor, a deep blue channel winding clear and distinct against the coral-covered lagoon, completely encircling Garden Key.

Some wit has described fishing in Florida in the summer as sitting in a Turkish bath holding a string,

## *Big Game at Sea*

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and I think the author of this *mot* found his inspiration on the reef on a warm day while trailing the sea-bat.

The heat was appalling, pouring down with such intensity that the shallows were too hot for comfort, and nebulous clouds wavered upward from the bleaching coral sand, distorting every object along shore. For days the dead calm had continued; the long sleepy summer was at its height, and one had to pick his time for sport and diversion. There was an hour or two at sunrise for barracuda spearing, or for the beating jacks; a long siesta at midday, then a while toward evening perhaps when one could lure the dainty gray snapper or test conclusions with the big sharks which swam the blue channel at all times. Then came the night, often cool, to be spent on the water listening to the melody of negro rowers, the weird tales of Chief, a Seminole, who preferred the heat of the outer reef to the mosquitos of the coast.

On such a night, when the only sound to break the stillness was the distant roar of the surf, there came out of the darkness, near at hand, a rushing, swishing noise; then a clap as of thunder, which seemed to go roaring and reverberating away over the reef, like the discharge of cannon. So startling was the sound, so peculiar, that the negroes stopped rowing, and one or two dropped their oars in consternation.

“Vampa fish, sah,” said Paublo, the stroke oar, in

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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a hushed tone, "an' he mighty uncomfortable near, sah, jes over yander."

I thought so myself as the eight-oared barge now rocked in the sea made by the fish. In a few moments another jumped some distance away, and we could hear a splashing sound, which Paublo said was caused by the fins as the fish rushed through the water.

The darkness was of that quality that could be felt, yet it was that described by Milton as

"Dark with expressive bright"

as the lagoon scintillated with phosphorescent light; every oar set the sea ablaze with silver radiance, and ahead of the boat waves of fire seemed to go rippling away. Now another seething, hissing sound was heard, and a blaze of triangular light above some huge, dim firebody below, glided swiftly along; then a volcano seemed to rend the very sea, and out of a blaze of phosphorescent light, that sent its radiations in every direction, rose a dim shape, cleaving the air to drop into another volcano, which opened to receive it with loud intonation.

"Sea vampa, sure," Paublo whispered, as though he feared that the unknown would hear him. "Dey jes wheelin' an' wheelin', leapin', an' I reckon we's in a bad place."

"Sea-bat," grunted Chief, as the ladies expressed alarm. "They jump five, yes, eight feet high."

## *Big Game at Sea*

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"How heavy are they?" I asked, thinking of possibilities.

"Three or four tons," replied Chief sententiously.

This answer was unsatisfactory to some of the party, so we hauled close in shore near Long Key, where we listened to the explosions, as they seemed to be nothing else, caused by the crash of the return of the leaping fish. A school of sea-vampires, sea-bats, or devil-fish, as men call them, had wandered into the lagoon. I knew them by reputation and hearsay, but never had seen one alive; and when I announced that I was going to take one on the following day, if they were still there, the boys, as the negroes were called, all protested.

"Why, marster, one of dem vampas yander is twenty feet wide, 'deed he is. Five years ago a schooner, seventy-ton burden, was layin' jes offen de pint yander; de capten had dun gone ashore an' all de crew 'ceptin' de cook was a-pickin' micramocs out on de reef, jes ober yander wha yo' see de ole wrack a-layin'; yes, sah, jes yander under de sudden cross. All at once dey hear de cook a-hailin' an' screamin' jes lak he crazy, an' lookin' up, dere was de schooner, sails furled, anchor down, a-sailin' outen de channel. De cook he ran 'bout lak he crazy; he don' want to jump overboard cause he 'fraid of de sharks, so he jes natchally yelled; an' de schooner sail on fo' half a mile, den stop, an' de men what had been fol-lerin' clim' board. What done it? Why, de vampa

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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fish. Yes, sah, he jes pick up de anchor an' tote it off."

Each boy had some particular story to relate as to the dangerous character of the fish and its gigantic size and strength, intended to convince the listener that its capture was impossible. I found that some of these stories were true. A sea-bat had towed a schooner up the channel, and while several attempts had been made to take one of these fish, it had never been accomplished in this locality. When I asked for a volunteer, after announcing my intention of trying this sport, the men were strangely silent. There was a superstition among them that the fish had some demoniac power; that it could seize a man in its claspers and hold him beneath its cloak-like body and smother him. I finally secured the services of Chief and Paublo, and by daylight the following morning we were on the water, the men pulling across the channel to the long lagoon which formed the break-water of the group to the east.

My boat was a light cedar yawl, built in Boston, thoroughly seaworthy and prepared for the rough weather that is often experienced among the keys, by having under her forward and side decks rows of air-tight cans, which more than once had proved to be of good service.

For weapons of offense I had the grains of the reef with which I had often taken large fishes. This harpoon consisted of a two-pronged spear attached

## *Big Game at Sea*

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to a steel cap which fitted closely upon a long, pliable yellow pine handle. The barbs of the points were movable; when they entered a fish they closed, but when the slightest strain came they opened and prevented the harpoon from tearing out. A stout line or rope was made fast to the grains and led up the pole, and three hundred feet of it coiled forward in a large half barrel. Beside this I had a sharp coral chisel to use as a lance in case of necessity. Thus equipped, we were ready for almost any game, at least of the sea.

The early mornings were usually ushered in by transformation scenes of splendid possibilities—staged in the heavens—and this was no exception. Long before the sun appeared the east was a mass of crimson clouds; first deep, dark and ominous, gradually increasing in brilliancy, color and tint, until the sun burst forth in all his splendor.

We soon reached the spot where we had heard the thundering of the sea-bat the preceding night, but the lagoon was apparently deserted. Chief suggesting that the fish did not come so far up until full flood tide, we turned and rowed to the south, parallel to the great fringing reef against whose sunken coral rocks the surf broke sullenly. Long Key—a sandy spit since destroyed by a hurricane—Bush Key and the long fringing reef two or three miles in length, formed three sides of the lagoon, which at high water was from four to twenty feet in depth and through a



## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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part of which ran a deep blue channel. Acres were covered with branch coral, while the rest of the bottom was either white sand or had a scant growth of algæ—the home of crawfish, crabs and various shell fish upon which I believe the big rays fed.

The men rowed slowly down the reef by an old ship blown in by a hurricane years before, now lying ghostly and still, with a corporal's guard of pelicans, frigate birds and gulls; down by Bird Key, whose population of terns rose high in the air with bewildering cries. I had begun to think that the morning was a poor time for vampire fishing, when Chief stopped rowing and pointed to the east. I turned in time to see a black triangular object waved above the surface; it might have been the dorsal fin of a shark, yet no shark had so black a topgallant sail, or, indeed, so large a one. Paublo was gazing at it with protruding eyes and parted lips; it was a rude awakening for him, as I believe he had considered it a forlorn hope, and secretly prayed that we might not see the dreaded fish. I turned the boat in the direction of the fin and bade the men give way. The trim cutter shot through the still water like a gull. Where I had sighted the fish the lagoon began to dip into the deep channel of the Gulf Stream as it flows between Cuba and the keys, and until nearly one hundred feet is reached every object on the bottom can be seen, so clear is the water.

We had almost reached the spot when not one, but

## *Big Game at Sea*

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five or six fins appeared, my exclamation causing the men to look around. I gave the tiller to Paublo, Chief taking the oars, and crept forward. As I picked up the grains I noticed that I could see the bottom distinctly thirty-five feet below. We had happened upon a school of the monsters which were indulging in some game of the sea. There were, perhaps, ten or twelve in all, moving in a circle one hundred and fifty feet in diameter, and churning the water into a veritable maelstrom. Chief was slowly and noiselessly propelling the boat ahead, and we drifted about thirty feet from the circumference of the circle.

Surely these fleeting, glistening figures were the witches of the world of fishes, as no more diabolical creature could be imagined. They resembled enormous bats, and in following one another around the circle, raised the outer tip of the long wing-like fin high out of the water in a graceful curve, the other being deeply submerged. Imagine a fish shaped something like a bat, the wings ending in graceful points, a vivid black on the upper surface and white beneath, a long whip-like tail, while from near the large and prominent eyes extend forward a pair of writhing, clasping finger-like tentacles three feet in length. Endow such a creature with marvelous activity and a constant desire to change its position and assume some extraordinary attitude, and possibly a faint conception of the actual appearance and per-

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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sonality of these strange creatures circling before me may be obtained.

As we slowly drifted nearer I could see them deep in the water, apparently going through a series of fantastic figures; now gliding down with flying motion of the wings; sweeping, gyrating upward with a twisting vertical motion marvelous in its perfect grace; now they flashed white, again black, so that one would have said they were rolling over and over, turning somersaults, were it possible for so large a fish to accomplish the feat. Since then I have been informed by one who had opportunity to watch them on many occasions, that this is what they were doing, and is really a common practice of the big rays. As I recall this strange performance, the huge creatures would suddenly turn over and shoot along upon their backs, thus displaying the pure white of the ventral surface, then again turning at the surface, move along with the remarkable, undulatory, bird-like motion. All this passed in rapid review, and fearing that they would become alarmed I gave the word, and Chief moved ahead.

I wished to select my game and make the throw as the fish turned, and to accomplish this I waited until several had passed. Finally we drifted directly in the path of the remarkable procession, the fishes paying no attention to the boat. One dived beneath her, another came careening up from below, standing directly on edge, as nearly as I could determine, and

## *Big Game at Sea*

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fairly exposed its broad back, not ten feet away; and as it glistened in the sun I hurled the grains into it with all my strength. The pine handle seemed to shoot into the air as it rebounded, then we became witnesses to the extraordinary agility of this monster ray. It appeared to fly into the air, rising, an appalling mass of flesh, out of the seething waters, its side wings beating the heated air as it rose, then falling with a crash and the reverberating sound we had listened to the night before; fell as a square twelve by ten feet and weighing a possible ton might fall.

As the heavy waves from the impact struck the boat, I stumbled into the bottom, rolling out of the way of the jumping line that was now hissing from the coil. The fish, after its first leap, had headed directly to the south, or out to sea, and the line was rising upward in coils. The Indian oarsmen rowed the boat ahead to lessen the strain when it should come, but so furious was the rush that I decided to check the fish before the rope was exhausted, and taking a piece of sail-cloth as a glove I grasped a coil and held on.

The boat was well under way, but the shock was terrific. Arms and muscles snapped, and for a moment the rope smoked through the cloth; then Chief dropped his oars and took it, and we were under way driving the fish by a single rein. I had used the boat to capture man-eater sharks, and as a precautionary measure to prevent the line from getting over the

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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side, had a deep notch cut in the bow, in which it rested. With no little difficulty we succeeded in lifting it in place, the bow of the boat at the water's edge riding a heavy sea, which rushed ahead of us as an advance guard. In a short time the fish towed us into deep water, and then surged downward, keeping near the bottom, and we were forced as far astern as possible to keep the bow from going under. I noticed that Chief had taken out a big sheath knife, which he habitually carried in a leather scabbard, and held it in his teeth—a significant movement that was not lost on Paublo, whose terrified glance shot from the fast-disappearing keys to the hissing line ahead and back again.

We were headed far out into the gulf, and for two miles or more the ray towed us at rapid pace. It was evident that if something was not done the line would have to be cut away or we would follow our wild steed indefinitely. I therefore directed the men to ship the oars and pull against it while I took a turn with the rope around the forward seat; but this powerful brake had no effect upon the fish. Then I determined to haul in and try to lance it. We were now a mile and a half, perhaps more, to the south of Bird Key in the open gulf and began to feel the long swell that ever rolled in from the west, while an ominous squall cloud as black as night, to the south dead ahead, did not add to the pleasures of the situation. The line was passed astern and we all "boused

## *Big Game at Sea*

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on," as Paublo expressed it; now gaining a foot, again slipping back, hauling, straining every muscle, slowly but surely forcing the light boat upon the fish to the accompanying shouts of Paublo and Chief—" *ah ho ah,*" "*ah he ho,*" "all together now," "*ah ho!*" Then would come a rush; the line would smoke through our fingers for ten or twenty feet, and we would lie back until the flurry seemed to die away to haul again.

For some time we worked in this way, until I estimated that the fish was not more than twenty feet away, and had crawled out on to the little deck to peer down into the water, when the line rapidly rose, then turned so sharply to the left that I was nearly thrown overboard. The Seminole, who was in the stern, grasped an oar and aided in hauling the boat around; but she yawed and careened so that the water poured in; then the fish appeared at the surface forty feet away, its wing waving in the air like the black piratical flag it was, perhaps in derision, perhaps in defiance, then disappeared. The fish had turned the keeled boat in little more than its length and was now towing us directly back to the lagoon—a proceeding more than satisfactory, as a storm was rapidly coming, and if caught we would have to cut away; so we sat with a turn of the line about the thwart on the alert for any move. Steam could hardly have towed us faster; we flew through the water throwing clouds of spray over the deck,

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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racing with flocks of gulls that eyed us curiously, plunging among schools of Portuguese men of war and *velellas*, and in a short time without incident entered the lagoon, where I decided to bring matters to a finish and cut away rather than go to sea a second time.

Whether the great fish was accustomed to go to a certain feeding ground and now returned in its terror from mere force of habit, I do not know, but the fact remains that it was rushing up the lagoon between Long Key and the outer fringing reef, into an almost perfect *cul de sac*, the water shallowing at every flap of its wonderful wings. I stood on the little deck and could see every movement of the strange fish, that in swimming over the white sandy bottom in water not over four feet in depth, displayed its outline perfectly.

Chief had the oar, steering the boat after the fish, which, it was expected, would turn at any moment, while Paublo stood amidships holding the rope, which had a turn about the seat. The lagoon narrowed rapidly, and at high tide a small boat-channel was formed; at other times being too shallow and easily waded. Perchance the fish having passed this at flood tide, was again making for it, hoping to reach deep water, which was but a stone's throw away. The graceful, bird-like movements of its fins was a fascinating spectacle; a waving, undulatory motion which sent the ray along at a remarkable speed, and

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the slightest increase of which forced it over the white sand like the shadow of a dark cloud.

We were running parallel to the beach, and some negroes stopped and waved their hats as we shot by. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the fish turned. I saw the pointed fin leap into the air until it stood upright, as the fish seemed to breast the water in the turn. I stepped back and shouted a warning to Chief. But it was too late. The bow of the boat was jerked, shivering and trembling, almost completely around, throwing Paublo over the rail into the lagoon, and was away almost before he recovered his feet and stood in water nearly up to his armpits looking at the retreating boat, doubtless with amazement seasoned with relief, as he could easily wade to Long Key.

The fish headed for the outer reef, on which a heavy sea was breaking; drawing little or no water it could doubtless plunge over while the boat would either ground, or if it succeeded in making the reef, would doubtless be swamped in the surf. We took the line as Paublo dropped it, and surged upon it with all our strength, and were encouraged by finding that the fish was weakening. But we were rapidly approaching the reef; another haul and we were nearly on top of our quarry, whose long tail was under the boat, the mighty wings pulsating just ahead. A patch of coral now loomed up, and this fortunate obstacle turned the fish and in the whirl the fin



## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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seemed to rise almost over the boat, hurling the spray over us, and once more we were off up the lagoon headed for the *cul de sac*.

I gave Chief the rope, and taking the big square-edged lance sent it into the black mass. A cloud of blood followed, while the speed of the fish was increased so that the bow was well under water, flush with the deck. Again and again I lanced the fish, but the blade was a chisel-like affair, and did not penetrate more than five or six inches. There was a duplicate pair of grains in the boat, and this weapon was also hurled into the ray's back, but still it rushed on, seemingly as vigorous as ever. I fully expected to see it turn again, but it held its course, heading directly for the narrow tide channel between Long and Bush Keys toward which Paublo was running along the beach of the former key. It was an exciting moment. The fish was alongside, yet we were going, as near as I could judge, at full speed.

Nearer we came, flying over the roots of mangroves, over patches of coral and sea-grass, into a narrow channel hardly four feet deep and not thirty feet wide, with a flat on each side partly bare. Not a tenth of a mile away the sea was beating on the reef, which meant liberty, if not life, to the fish. But fishermen's luck was ours. The tide was so low that it left but two feet in the upper head of the channel into which we ran. The fish discovered its error too late, but made a clever attempt to rectify

## *Big Game at Sea*

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it, turning and lifting itself partly out of water, rolling the boat over, throwing oars, grains, and fishermen into the shallow lagoon.

The turn cost the fish its life, as it ran high on to the narrow mud flat, where it beat the shallow water with its powerful wings, every movement urging it further out of its native element. Paublo, who had waded across the little channel, in his exuberance, bounded onto the flat back of the monster and waved his hands aloft, while Chief ran in shore with the rope and presently had the devil fish securely fastened to a mangrove tree not fifty feet away.

We had earned our game and were well exhausted. At high water the ray could have escaped by way of the channel through which, doubtless, it often passed.

Stretched upon the hot sands beneath the straggling mangroves, Paublo humming a low barcarole of his own invention, Chief silent, but with a long smile fixed upon his countenance, we could not believe but that the writhing black mass was a monstrous bird, one of the uncanny pterodactyls which geologists dream about; yet it was a noble quarry,

“The struck eagle stretched upon the plain,  
No more through rolling clouds to soar again.”

The weight of the ray we could only conjecture, but it was doubtless over a ton; and had this light and airy swimmer sprung upon the boat it would have crushed it like paper.

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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When the tide was at the ebb the black vampire, as the men called it, was high and dry, and was paced off. It was thirteen feet from tip to tip, ten feet long from its mouth to the base of its tail, which was about seven feet in length. It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the appearance of this devil-fish, sea-vampire, this *Manta brevirostra* of science, which is so difficult to take that it more often runs away with boats than is captured, and of whose habits very little is known. Indeed, vampire fishing will never be a popular sport except among those who delight in an element of danger with their pastimes.

Mr. G. E. Northrop, of Chicago, captured a very large sea-bat in the Gulf of Mexico in the summer of 1898, and in a letter to the writer described it as remarkable sport. The fish gave a hard fight, towing the heavy boat a long distance. Unfortunately the photographs of this fish turned out unsatisfactorily, though they gave some idea of the monster.

The big ray was almost jet black upon its upper surface, the back being rough; the under surface was white, with gray cloud effects here and there, giving it a marbled appearance. Popular fancy has given the fish a sting above the base of the tail, but this is a misnomer; it is without the serrated lance which marks many of the tribe which I took in these waters, one of which wounded a companion by striking its lances across his foot.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The mouth of the ray was of ominous dimensions, and afforded room for a man to lie very snugly coiled up within. The teeth were very small, but the extraordinary feature of this fish—the one which has given rise to many tales, true and legendary—is its two tentacles or claspers, fleshy objects about four or five inches wide and three feet long, which extend outward from each side of the mouth. Their office is undoubtedly to aid in securing food. When the fish is moving they are in constant motion, being whirled about like the tentacles of a squid, and that they are muscular and powerful has been demonstrated on many occasions. The natural movement of the claspers is inward, and when any object strikes between them it is instinctively held—a proceeding which explains the undoubted fact that these fishes can run away with vessels.

At least five instances of this were heard of on the reef occurring from Tampa Bay to Garden Key, and the Hon. Wm. Elliott, formerly of Beaufort, S. C., a famous hunter of this game, reports two instances from that State. In every case the vessels, always at anchor, suddenly moved off in a mysterious manner and were towed greater or less distances. The ray had collided with the chain, and, true to its instincts, threw its two tentacular feelers or claspers around it and rushed ahead, thus lifting the anchor. That the claspers are very powerful is well shown by the experience of Mr. Elliott, who, in endeavoring

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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to kill a large fish, which he had harpooned and run down, with a knife, felt his arm seized and held so securely that it became numb. He called to the men to hold the fish at all hazards; but it is obvious that if the animal which they had just hauled to the boat had made a rush and broken the harpoon or rope the sportsman would have been carried off in its embrace.

That so enormous an animal can leap so easily and so high is remarkable, and I believe that this is a common pastime, as in later attempts to follow the fishes at night, I frequently heard the resounding crash that told of the return. The ray which I struck seemed to clear the water three feet, but Chief said that he had seen them jump five feet, while Mr. Elliott, already quoted, states that he has seen them bound ten feet into the air.

On the outer reef this fish was considered a dangerous animal, and was never followed. Some years previous an attempt had been made to catch one which fouled a vessel's cable. The fish became impaled on the anchor, and when brought up broke away. It was then harpooned, but escaped after leaping partly on the boat, breaking the oars on one side, and seriously injuring the crew, who were crushed into the sinking craft. So the sea-vampire, which was supposed to suffocate its victims with its cloak-like wings, was dreaded, and that any one should consider it sport to follow such a creature

## *Big Game at Sea*

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and hunt it down was more than the ordinary reef negro could understand.

The negroes of upper Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas, where the fish is also found, are equally afraid of it; yet, in 1845, to take one of these monsters was considered in these States the highest phase of sport, and the visitor to any of the hospitable plantations near Hilton Head would be sure to be invited to a sea-vampire or devil-fish hunt. The sport was followed with great abandon, and one gentleman had a record of sixteen sea-vampires taken with the harpoon in one season, the fish towing him from ten to twenty miles, and fighting from one to five hours.

The waters of Port Royal Sound were the breeding grounds of the fish, and it is a singular fact that the wild excitement embodied in the sport was discovered in an attempt at retaliation on the part of the planters whose property had been destroyed by the rays. Those whose property abutted the Sound had water fences which marked the limits of their plantations seaward, and some had piers extending out into the water. The heavy posts, which would be in deep water at flood tide, were mysteriously hauled up, and I am informed by a gentleman from this section that the piles of wharves were occasionally similarly treated. For a long time the cause was unexplained, but finally a school of large rays was seen to sweep along and collide with the piles. The

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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fish evidently threw their claspers about them and in the violent struggles which ensued wrenched them loose.

The sportsmen made the attack in eight-oared barges propelled by negroes, and when the strike was made the barge rushed away toward the ocean, several other boats being caught as they passed until the fish was towing a procession of craft. The initial fish measured twenty feet across, and from that time on the exciting pastime became the sport above all others of the Sound region. The catches were marked by many sensational features. On one occasion Mr. T. R. S. Elliott was the harpooner, and when the fish was struck it cleared the water, striking the boat in the bow, sweeping away all the oars on one side, and sending her astern so violently that every man in the barge was thrown from his seat and one or two severely crushed. The man at the helm, James Cuthbert, was pitched headlong on to the deck, while Mr. Elliott took a flying leap into the air, landing upon the back of the struggling fish. He was fortunately hauled aboard before the ray got under way, and stood on the little deck, drenched, and raised a cheer as the boat moved off behind the wild steed.

The legend heard in the Pacific that this fish envelops its prey with its cloak-like wings may be traced to the ancient authors, among whom Oppian writes, "It is the broadest among fishes" (*Eurotatos pantessin*

## *Big Game at Sea*

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*metichthusin*); and he further describes its habit of seizing mariners, sinking with them and smothering the victim beneath its wings. This belief is still held by the pearl divers off the southern Gulf Coast. The truth is that while the fish makes a remarkable fight for its liberty, it is timid and never attacks; the fouling of anchors, the leaping upon boats being mere accidents attendant upon the movement of a large fish in agony and fear.

In following this sport in Port Royal Sound the sharks were often a factor to be dealt with, attacking the wounded sea-vampire in such numbers that while being towed by a fish Mr. Elliott took with a line as many as six hammerheads which were following the trail of blood; vicious monsters ranging up to nine feet in length.

In its peculiar somersaults the bat is not unique, as I have repeatedly observed the California banded sheepshead roll over and over; yet in so large a fish it is a remarkable act. Merely venturing an opinion I am inclined to think that this may be a feature of courtship, and nowhere have the strange gambols been so often observed as in Port Royal Sound. Here the fishes were repeatedly seen by Mr. Elliott, as I saw them once in the Gulf of Mexico, and my father, the late Dr. J. B. Holder, saw them at Tampa, swimming in a circle, black and white flashing at intervals as they somersaulted; now swimming upon their backs; now vaulting into the air and while



## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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in this position falling upon the back. Sometimes the act would be performed in deep water, the flash of the white ventral side alone telling the story of the turn; again the water would boil at the surface, the horns appear and the huge fish would roll completely over until its tail lashed the air in its descent. So commonly was this trick performed that more than one of the fishes taken by Mr. Elliott was harpooned in the belly.

It is believed that specimens measuring nearly thirty feet across have been seen. Mitchell refers to one caught in the West Indies which required six oxen to drag it up the beach; but the average ray taken on American shores, which the sportsmen may expect to find in the summer months from Port Royal Sound to Garden Key and up the west coast of Florida, and in Lower California, will rarely exceed eighteen or twenty feet in width—large enough to afford some of the most exciting experiences in the annals of sport with the spear at sea.

So rare is this great game, so difficult to take, that every catch is an incident worthy of being placed on record. While this chapter was being written, a devil-fish was taken off Aransas Pass, Texas, which so well illustrates the remarkable staying qualities of the animal that I take the liberty of copying an article by Mr. W. G. Sterett, which appeared in the *Dallas (Texas) News*, describing the sport, or rather battle between the devil-fish, which for its size made

## *Big Game at Sea*

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an extraordinary exhibition of strength. I had visited Aransas Pass the season previous, and hoped to find a devil-fish and renew the acquaintance of years before on the opposite side of the Gulf, but none were seen. Mr. Sterett is a wise man in his generation, as he determined not to tell his story until he could reinforce it by photographs of the catch, feeling confident that no one would believe it, and not knowing that Mr. Tomlinson, of St. Petersburg, Fla., had taken a number in his specially prepared boat, and that devil-fish spearing was the manly sport sixty years ago in South Carolina. Mr. Sterett says:

For two days before it occurred, four or five of these creatures were seen near the end of the jetties extending from St. Joseph's Island. They were on the surface, moving around something like cattle feeding in a pasture. Our party, which it may be well to mention was composed of the following gentlemen, since some of them may be worthy of belief, consisted of John W. Robbins, Austin; Eugene Cherry, Sherman; E. P. Gregg, Sherman; P. R. Markham, Sherman; O. C. Ahlers, Sherman; T. T. Fuller, Wichita Falls; Brig. Gen. Cleary, San Francisco; J. W. Maxwell, Austin; Walter Crow, Waxahachie; Eugene Carley, Terrell; Capt. Walters, Houston; N. L. Buckner, Dallas; Dr. G. H. Wooten, Austin; R. C. Roberdeau, Austin; Butz Metzler, Dallas; Dr. E. V. Dickey, Dallas; L. A. Pires, Dallas; C. C. Cobb, Dallas, and myself. Nat-

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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urally, the presence of these fish excited considerable comment and provoked suggestions as to how they could be taken. On the day before the capture nearly all of the party were at the end of the jetties engaged in tarpon, mackerel and sheepshead fishing. One of the creatures came near a boat with its mouth open as natural, since it is unable to shut it, and Mr. Cherry, of Sherman, threw his hook into it. In pulling it out it caught on the upper part of the mouth. There was a swish, a whirr of the reel, a convulsive grab for a firmer hold on the rod, a great deal of consternation, a surge of the prow of the boat bottomward and the snap of the line, which was musical to Mr. Cherry and his attendant.

Butz Metzler, of Dallas, brimful of luck, pulled his line over the back of another with the result of imbedding his tarpon hook in some part of its body. A wail, a sort of wraith wail, went up from the boat which sounded, "I can't stop him." Metzler's boat went skimming for nearly half a mile, when his boatman, with rare presence of mind, bethought him of his knife and thus relieved Mr. Metzler and himself from an embarrassing position by severing the line. General Cleary threw his bait and hook over another one of them, with the result of catching a fish, new to these waters. It was said that this fish was riding on the back of the devil-fish, but this story proved to be untrue. Now, when this experience was discussed in the evening it was determined that an effort should

## *Big Game at Sea*

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be made to capture one of the monsters. Edward Cotter, the proprietor of Tarpon Inn, volunteered to make the effort if properly assisted by others, the Sherman, or Athenian, contingent of the party being especially anxious to attempt the feat.

Among the visitors to this resort this year was one Mr. Mayer, of New York, an ardent fisherman, who comes to the place every year. On this occasion he brought and left a new harpoon. It consisted simply of a bolt of steel about six inches long and was a half inch in diameter. The weapon was made so that when the blow was struck the handle would come out, leaving the harpoon proper attached to the rope in the flesh of the victim.

Early next morning the attempt was made, and a monstrous specimen was soon found, and when two of the party who were in a launch had reached within a few feet of the fish, which evinced not the least fear, one of them, named Kline, got up on his seat—he is a man of six feet and over, and of powerful build—and hurled the harpoon with all his strength. With a bolt of steel about the length of a railroad spike, with the weight of eight feet of half-inch iron rod behind it and with a man of marvelous strength impelling it, the harpoon sank into the mass of meat several inches. There was a boiling of water. The boat started as a flushed quail. The bow sank deep and away went the boat for the gulf. The two men, accustomed to the sea and things out of the ordinary,

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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settled in their seats in a moment. Each held the rope and, I think, had it around some sort of snubbin post at the bow. The sudden rush and speed might have broken the rope or the barbs of the harpoon in less skillful hands, but the craft was well managed. Rope was let out in the rushes. Rope was drawn in on curves or the least cessation of extreme effort on the part of the wounded monster, which soon demonstrated that its wounds or the restraint placed on it had rendered it unable to maintain a straightaway course. The rest of the party sat in their boats, heard the thud as the harpoon was thrown, saw the two men in their boat fairly fly toward the ocean, but no one knew what to do to aid those who had made the attack. General Cleary and his boat were closer to the fish than any other person at the time the harpoon was thrown. His boatman started in pursuit, and as their boat was a light yawl or "dinghy," as they call it there, he was able to keep in pretty fair distance. The fish made its first swerve from a straightaway course a few minutes after it was struck. It made a quarter or half circle and when it did it Cleary's boat attached itself to the boat of Kline and Farley. Now it had two boats to pull with four men. Soon it made another deviation and another boat threw its anchor in the Cleary boat. All the other boats, seeing the success of Cleary, were rushing as fast as they could to do as he had done. The result was that in half an hour the beast was

## *Big Game at Sea*

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towing thirteen boats, in each of which were two men. The most of these boats were heavy sixteen-foot boats used for tarpon and sea fishing, while some of them were gasoline launches. All had been done that could be done by the generals in the fight. The policy was to finally tire out the monster and then drag him ashore.

It was about half past ten o'clock when Kline threw the harpoon. Eleven o'clock came and the ray was scurrying around in the gulf with apparent utmost ease. Out to the ocean buoy, away beyond the Pass buoy, he took us. Around the ocean buoy he went with his string of boats, and round it again. Once he went so close to it that we thought he would foul us on the chain of the beacon, but there was no trouble. Then out in the gulf he went until the land had almost faded. Back he came again, sometimes in a way to show he had lost nothing of his vitality and strength, and then again he was moving slowly enough to excite the cry from boat to boat, "He's all in," "He's giving up," "He can't last but a few minutes longer." But words of cheer of this kind died on the lips when the fish would gather up his strength and make taut the line of every boat as he fairly flew through his element. Twice, when he was circling, he took short cuts and went under the boats. In each case it was for all the world like a mad beast surrounded and it had resolved to break through. As he made these moves there was a

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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scurrying in the boats, an untying of tow lines and a breaking away, each boat for itself. But as soon as it had passed out of the circle the boats were attached again and he proceeded with his heavy drag out in the gulf, close to shore, back toward the jetties, out in the gulf again, pursuing his way as a drunken man, staggering, uncertain, indefinite, blindly.

The fun of the thing began to pall about half past twelve. The gulf was fortunately calm, but the tropical sun beat down fiercely, there was no ice water, men who had been up from daylight began to feel an unpleasant feeling in the region of the stomach. Then again there was not much sport in being dragged around in the ocean by a creature which no one but the man of the harpoon and his companion had seen. More than this, the fish appeared to be just about as strong as when first struck, and there was every prospect, unless he was further trammelled or injured, that he could drag his flotilla for a week or month. I have said there were thirteen boats attached to him, but not all were attached in the first hour. That needs explanation to the extent of saying that two or three came into the procession a little later. Treasurer Robbins got into line about an hour after the fish was harpooned. Dr. Wooten and Mr. Roberdeau got in a little later. Mr. Robbins gave frequent advice as to how to carry on the fight. I did the same thing. It should be said, to the credit of the boatmen actually doing the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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work, that they paid not the least attention to either of us, thus showing their wisdom and avoiding the possible escape of the prize. It was suggested by some wise man in the battle—it was neither Robbins nor myself—that if we could receive reinforcements we might triumph. It was suggested by some pessimistic gentlemen that if we didn't get reinforcements we would never get the fish.

Finally it was agreed to hoist a signal of distress, though it was certainly a shameful thing for twenty-six men to do, and call out the life-saving crew. So we hoisted a red and white handkerchief on a fishing pole and stuck it as high as possible toward the sky. At this season of the year the life-saving service has a man at each station in the cupola on the top of the building. The watch at the Pass saw the signal, and with his glasses ascertained our trouble. He notified Mr. Cotter, who, with another harpoon and a Savage rifle, shooting a 30-30 soft-nosed bullet, came out to where we were yet playing the "ring around the roses" with what was once our prize, but which now had about reversed conditions and made us its prize.

Cotter anchored his large launch and, betaking himself to a boat, proceeded with his weapons to the side of the boat immediately attached to the devil fish. But I am getting on too fast. Before Mr. Cotter came Walter Crow of Waxahachie, in a launch with his wife, who had been sloshing around fishing for tarpon and mackerel and taking a long shot now



## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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and then at a snipe or other sea bird with a pump gun, arrived on the scene. Ardent sportsman, he was enthusiastic. He hauled up by the side of the boat of Klein and Farley. Some one suggested that Klein pull the fish to the surface and that Mr. Crow should shoot. At once a chorus filled the air, "Don't shoot; you might hit somebody"; "Don't shoot; the shot will scatter"; "For heaven's sake, don't shoot." Mr. Crow, evidently impressed by this loud and universal request, and further by the fact that the monster persisted in remaining twenty to thirty feet in the depths of the sea, turned his attention to relieving the two tired boatmen by assisting them at the ropes. And he did valiant service. When Cotter came alongside of the Klein-Farley boat he quickly got his harpoon ready and the ropes adjusted. Then Klein, Farley, Crow and Cotter used their supreme efforts to pull the fish to the top. For a time their efforts were unavailing. But after a while the line slackened a little and the bulky thing began to arise. Up, up it came, the personification of stubbornness and weight. When within two feet of the surface Cotter, with all his force, threw his harpoon. The monster, stung again, threw one of its flippers in the air, sunk in a flash, was gone again. Men who had been standing up in their boats to witness what they hoped would be the *coup de maître*, fell back in their seats with a back-dislocating jolt. Again the monotonous travel

## *Big Game at Sea*

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around the gulf began. It was about two o'clock. Two ropes were attached to the fish now, and the two could be used by two crews to stop him and get him to the surface. Time and fatigue were required to stop him. Strength was required to get him to the surface.

Time and fatigue did what was expected. The subterranean locomotive began to go slow. Then it stopped. Now was the time for strength. Down at the bottom the creature lay, full eighteen hundred pounds in weight. The two crews bent over to get hold of the ropes as near the water as possible. They heaved. From every throat came cheers of encouragement. They heaved again and there was slack in the ropes. Again the cheers arose and the monster weight gradually came up to the surface. Cotter seized his rifle. Bang! There was a splash. Away went the boats again. But there was one shot in him anyhow, and one shot from a Savage with a soft-nosed or dum-dum bullet means death. Again the creature slowed up. Again supremest effort lifted it to the top. Again, bang! Then, bang-bang! The creature sunk. But there was no tightening of the ropes on the boats. It had gone down under mortal, paralyzing wounds. Slowly again it was brought to the surface. The blood from it reddened the sea all around. Ropes were attached to it and then fastened to the big launch and back toward the hotel it was towed, while the victors, or those who had engaged in the hunt, went other

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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ways, since the launch could pull no more than the great weight which it had at its stern.

When the shore was reached the island people and all the guests of the hotel flocked to the beach to see it. Thirty or forty boys and men tugged at ropes to get it through the shallow water to where it could be photographed and examined. Here it was raised by block and tackle and pictures taken. It was then lowered and Dr. Wooten, of Austin, Dr. Dickey, of Dallas, Dr. Greenwood, of San Antonio, Dr. Ahlers, of Sherman, and Dr. Cleary, of California, engaged in a post-mortem examination.

Captain E. H. Tomlinson, of Florida, previously mentioned, has probably had more remarkable experiences with devil-fishes than any one in America. He has built a non-capsizable catamaran from which he harpoons them. The following account of his most recent catch I take in part from a St. Petersburg (Florida) paper:

### **BIG DEVIL-FISH.**

**Deep Sea Monster Harpooned off Egmont Key and Towed to City.**

Hundreds of people were on the streets in a steady stream for several hours Wednesday afternoon, the occasion being the bringing into port of a monster devil-fish sighted and harpooned near Egmont Key by Captain E. H. Tomlinson on Wednesday morning.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The monster weighed 1200 pounds, measured thirteen feet across, and twelve feet six inches from mouth to tip of tail, and there was "something doing" before he was landed. The launch *Uncle Sam* sighted the fish at ten o'clock Wednesday morning between Fort Dade and Fort De Soto, on Egmont and Mullet Keys, and about one-half mile from land. The harpoon was thrown at ten-fifteen from the starboard side of the launch, and found one of the few soft spots in the tough hide of his satanic majesty of the deep, catching a firm hold. So well did it stick in fact that the heavy iron rod was bent before the devil fish was finally subdued. Instantly the fish dove deep, taking 250 feet of line at a whizzing gait, and when snubbed on the stern bitt, towed the launch half a mile, stern ahead. With the aid of Captain Will McPherson and Arthur May, the line was passed to the bow, and snubbing on the forward bitt, everything was ready for a tow, which was enjoyed by all except the devil-fish, for thirty minutes, the men occasionally taking in slack line, or losing line when the fish got especially energetic and spurted.

At the end of an hour, the captors were able to get the fish near enough the launch to fasten a tarpon gaff into the lower jaw, made it fast on deck, and started for St. Petersburg.

The party reached port, bringing with it its distinguished captive at four o'clock in the afternoon, and landed at the city dock, at the foot of Central

## *Trailing the Sea-Bat*

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Avenue. The news of the capture spread rapidly, and in a few minutes the dock was crowded with spectators. These as they left told the news to others, and thanks to thorough advertising, it was not long until nearly everybody in town it seemed, was traveling to the water front. Dozens of kodaks and cameras were in evidence, and the devil fish was the most photographed curiosity the city has seen for many a day.

## CHAPTER II

### DIVING FOR TURTLES.

**W**HETHER it was the ill-concealed smile of incredulity on the face of my boatman, or the rashness of over-confidence I know not, but I had announced that I was going to take a big green turtle, single handed, on the outer reef, and the statement had aroused no little interest among the fishermen, wreckers and Conchs, who made up the little settlement on Long Key.

It was April and intense heat—the advance guard of the long summer—was beginning to be felt; yet the days were perfect. The islands—a dozen or more—seemed like emeralds in settings of silver, resting on an azure sea of glass. Not a ripple could be seen save that made by the fin of some vagrant shark; not a sound broke the stillness, except the occasional “*ha-ha*” of the laughing gull, and the musical and distant roar of the waves as they piled in upon the outer reef. The air of early morning was cool and delicious, and as the sun came up, suffusing the eastern sky with long vermilion streamers, Long John would shove off his dinghy, and with myself as companion, scull out into the great lagoon, which formed

## *Diving for Turtles*

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the central field of the growing atoll, and search for turtles or the large and gamy barracuda, both of which we took with the grains.

Long John was well named. Nearly seven feet in height, thin as the conventional rail, angular as a manzanita tree, his face fiery red, from the combined results of Bacchus and the sun god, he was a landmark; and standing in the dinghy, slowly sculling, his long grains-pole in hand, his small gray eyes fixed ahead, he looked from a distance like the mast of the boat; indeed, it was said on the reef that once when out with his mate, Bob Rand, he stood up, and stretching his arms wide apart as yards, boomed out a big foresail which sailed the craft into port. Long John's method of taking turtles, both the green and loggerhead, was to peg them; the weapon a three-sided peg (cut from the tip of a file and polished) which fitted into the long pole, or handle, and was held in place by a long cord.

At this season of the year the turtles were found feeding on the lagoon bottom, and often asleep, when it was comparatively easy to approach them; for when alarmed they invariably rose to the surface to breathe before making off. At that time the peg of my companion would reach them, the long pole trembling through the air like a living thing. In the early days of these trips, during my novitiate on the reef, my station was in the bow of the dinghy, where I could readily see the black forms of the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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turtles lying in water but six or eight feet deep—a striking contrast to the white sandy floor of the lagoon. Often John would scull the boat within six feet of them before they awoke. It was this circumstance which led me into deep waters. I believed that if the dinghy could be brought within fifteen feet of a sleeping turtle I could slip overboard, and by diving, swim up behind, grasp the victim and wear it out in the shallow lagoon.

“How long kin you stay under watah, sah? I reckon it all depends on that,” said Long John, and he reckoned further that if I could stay there twenty minutes it might be done. Bob Rand, another indisputable authority, reckoned that a big loggerhead would reach around and bite off my arm, and regaled me with the exciting incident of a battle royal which he had witnessed between a shark and a turtle, in which the latter was the conqueror. Contrary to their expectations, all this only increased my desire to make an attempt, and, finally, the two fishermen agreed to aid me in what might be considered a training for the event. In a word, we were first to go on what, on the reef, was termed a turtle turn. The game was to be turned, then placed in a “crawl” where I could, as Bob expressed it, “get my hand in” for the attempt on the open reef and sea.

All this was alluring, and the first moonlight night found us crossing the channel between Garden Key and Loggerhead, the twelve-oared barge propelled



## *Diving for Turtles*

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by a black crew whose songs and laughter went rolling over the still waters, despite Long John's warning that it would frighten every turtle off the reef. The moon was just rising, the Southern Cross set in brilliants in the south, as the boat slid into the soft sand of Loggerhead. As we tumbled out the boys hauled the barge above high-water mark, after which Long John called the crew together and apportioned them off. Sam Pinckney was to take the point; Paublo the bight; Dave King the cactus patch, while Tom Mallory was to go right across the island, and Scope down by Soldier Crab Point; and so on until the beach of the long isle of sand, with its bay cedar and cactus topping, was laid out into districts, each in charge of a "boy." Long John and I took our station two hundred yards down the beach, and here, in low tones, he gave me the details of turtle turning. The animals would begin to appear as soon as the moon rose, come slowly ashore, and deposit their eggs, in a hole above tide water, after which they would return to the water by a different route.

To cover the entire beach the men were stationed along shore, two hundred yards or so apart, where they were supposed to lie concealed, either in the bush or in depressions in the sand. Every half hour they were to walk quietly down to the water's edge and then run rapidly along to the next station, watching out for tracks that led upward. In this way every foot of the shore was covered. The position Long

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John had selected was in the lee of the south point of the key, where the gentle waves came purring up the beach in little eddies. The track of the moon on the water was a blaze of silver, reaching far away, in which the splashing and leaping of large fish could be occasionally seen. The stillness was almost absolute. Now and then came the weird cry of a wandering tern, or the scrambling sound of the purple land crabs as they climbed the low bushes. Finally I heard a mysterious sound on the sand, and in the bright moonlight made out scores of almost pure white spirit crabs, perched on high legs, standing around us, evidently holding a conference as to what we were. At the slightest movement they would dash away in a wild scurry and reach their holes; then when all was again quiet they would come pouring out to resume their observations.

I was lying in a depression in the soft sand watching these ghostly marauders, who seemed to be undecided whether to attack us or not, when Long John, who had been looking up and down the beach, uttered a slight *click* and touched my arm, pointing to the sea. There, right in the path of the moon, half in the water, half out, its back gleaming and glistening, was a huge turtle. It was looking the situation over and perchance had a suspicion that something was wrong. It remained in the same position four or five minutes, with its head raised as though listening, then seemingly satisfied, it came

## *Diving for Turtles*

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crawling laboriously upward. It was headed directly for us, coming on slowly but surely, and in a few minutes it was twenty feet from the water.

Long John did not move, waiting until the unsuspecting turtle was within ten feet of us, then we sprang at it, and as I reached its side I was amazed at its size—the veritable king of the logger-heads, its back, broad enough to hold three men standing, its huge head and jaws showing plainly, while its long and ponderous flippers gave it the appearance of extraordinary width. As we suddenly appeared the turtle swung seaward, whirling the sand in all directions in the violence of its rush. John grasped the shell between the flippers and gave a heroic lift, while I, missing my grasp, received a volley of sand from the flippers and fell upon my side.

“Get in front,” cried Long John, who, unable to make the turn single handed had swung himself upon the back of the frightened animal and was endeavoring to stop it by thrusting his feet into the sand. But to get in front and stay there were two different propositions. To face the ugly head and horny jaws of the great animal, without a weapon, was not to my taste, so after vainly resisting its charge, I fell back, and both of us grasped it by the side and lifted. Up it came a foot, and then another, Long John shouting all the nautical epithets of encouragement and invective he could think of; but the moment the

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turtle's flippers were clear of the sand they came whistling through the air, striking me such a staggering blow on the side of the face that I lost my hold and fell against my companion, and down went the turtle. Again we seized it, and with a rush endeavored to turn it; but despite all our attempts the animal fell back and struggled on in the direction of the sea.

It was evidently too much of a lift for us, so Long John ran along the beach, returning with an oar just as the turtle was carrying me upon its back into the water. He stopped it for a moment by striking it upon its head, then, running the oar beneath it, we both took hold of the lever and with a shout had the monster upon its side; a moment later it was sprawling and helpless on its back, beating its armored breast with its powerful flippers in impotent rage, snapping at the oar and crushing the hard wood.

"I've turned heaps of turtle here and over yander, sah," said Long John, "but that's the onerest one of the lot. I reckon it weighs eight hundred pounds."

The animal was so heavy that we could not haul it out of the water, and as the tide was coming in John started for the next station and brought back two men. The turtle was, with their help, then hauled up the beach where Long John lashed the flippers, each side together, with rope yarn by the simple expedient of cutting holes through the flesh with his knife. Our game was as vicious a specimen

## *Diving for Turtles*

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as ever came under my observation in many later experiences. Its enormous head had a particularly ugly expression; its large eyes were sunken, watery and bloodshot, and when turned slightly in the direction of its captors had a disagreeable menace. As I looked it over I came to the conclusion that an attempt to hold an animal of that size in the open water must fail.

In the course of the night, seven or eight other turtles were taken. I had a hand in three of these turns, losing one turtle, which I ran across about five feet from the water. It turned with remarkable celerity, and though I lifted and threw myself upon its back, holding tight, it carried me down to the water's edge and into it, where I was forced to release it, to the amusement of the boys who came up in time to witness my discomfiture. In the morning the boat was rowed round and loaded with the spoils.

Turtle turning, except when the animal is a very large one, is a clever trick. Some of the men could topple one over with ease, completely escaping the flying flippers. What was known as the turtle corral, or "crawl," as the boys termed it, was an inclosure nearly half a mile long and about sixty feet wide, varying in depth from four to eight feet; the tide rising and falling through a gate which led to the open sea. Into this the turtles were liberated to fatten and await execution; turtle meat being the beef of this remote and out-of-the-way corner of the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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world. The laying time of the turtles was the harvest, and three islands of the group upon which the animals were found, were patrolled with more or less regularity, and with such success that in three weeks forty or fifty turtles of the green and loggerhead persuasion were confined in the corral, which was so extensive that they might as well, so far as personal comfort was concerned, have been in the open sea. In walking around the wall they could be seen dotting the white sandy bottom, singly and in groups, occasionally rising to the surface to breathe and uttering a loud hiss, then dropping down to the bottom to sleep.

One morning I determined to make the attempt to take a turtle, single handed, and having incautiously given it out to Long John, I found a small but enthusiastic crowd at the tide gate awaiting me. There was no time lost in hunting; the game was plentiful, and the bottom dotted everywhere with the big black forms; yet as I slipped quietly into the water, near the tide gate, I felt that the most difficult part of my training for the *grand prix* of the outer reef was yet to come. I had located a large green turtle, which was lying in the center of the "crawl," in about eight feet of water, and slowly and carefully swam toward it. When about fifteen feet from it, I dropped under water, sank to the bottom, and swam rapidly toward the animal. The water was very clear, and in a few seconds I sighted the game lying flat, its flippers

## *Diving for Turtles*

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extended, its head resting on the sand, apparently asleep. A few strokes brought me directly over it, then I quickly grasped the big creature with both hands, by the projecting shell just over the head. What happened during the succeeding seconds left a very distinct impression on my mind. I remember seeing the big head rise, the flippers strike the bottom, and in a cloud of sand and rushing water, I felt myself jerked to the surface with irresistible force; then dragged down again and away, on the back of as wild a steed as one would wish to mount on land or sea.

The turtle in its alarm had instinctively dashed to the surface to breathe, then plunged down, with perhaps an undefined idea of washing me off. The remark of Long John that I might win if I could remain under water twenty minutes flashed through my mind, and I was fast giving out when the turtle rose again to blow. In reality it had dragged me only about fifty feet, but, so rapid was the rate against the water, that it increased the necessity for breathing. At the time, I believe I could remain under water about one minute under normal conditions, which were now certainly reversed. I allowed myself to stretch out perfectly straight at first, thus aiding my steed, which was now flying along like a bird, and for a second time I was threatened with suffocation. I could feel the veins in my head swelling, my eyes seemed ready to start from my head, and

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I was about to release my hold when it occurred to me to try and stop the animal. Acting on the idea, I drew up my knees and secured a position, which if the turtle had been on land would have been a kneeling one. This brought my body directly against the rushing water. The effect upon the turtle was instantaneous; my changed position deflected its head upward, and out of the water we came, I gasping for wind, the turtle uttering a loud snort. As it plunged down again, I heard the shouts of the men on the wall, caught a "bravo!" from some one, and realized that I had accidentally solved the secret of turtle riding. So no sooner did the animal dive and carry me to the bottom, then I immediately brought it up by kneeling on its shell. But the turtle did not surrender at once. It swam on the surface when it could not dive, plunged downward, and turned on its side, endeavoring to wash me off; but by continually using my body as a brake, I succeeded, after a run of perhaps five hundred feet, in reducing my fiery steed to terms. I turned it in the direction of shallow water, and finally gaining my feet, held it. The big animal had lost literally its wind.

After some weeks of this sport I assumed that I was an expert in riding turtles, and was more than confident that I could take one on the outer reef. So one day Long John and I pushed off and sculled over to the lagoon, looking for a victim. The lagoon was cut in its very center by a deep channel, as blue



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as sapphire—a veritable gem of the sea, which wound in and out in a mysterious fashion; its sides so steep and precipitous that, standing on the edge in six or eight feet of water, one could look directly down into the blue depths. We crossed this and presently sighted a turtle, perhaps one hundred feet from the edge. I immediately slipped overboard, and Long John, locating the position of the animal, carefully approached it from behind. It was fast asleep, and when within reaching distance I dived, while Long John backed away. I drew near with great caution, swimming low and deep, then, when directly over it, I seized it, pressing my knees upon the shell. The same convulsive rush to the surface followed, as on previous occasions, but this steed had never been turned, had never felt a grasp upon its shell, and the force of its plunge and rush was sufficient to loosen my hold. By good luck, more than anything else, however, I succeeded in retaining my grasp, though it was impossible to keep my knees on the shell, and the turtle towed me along, stretched at full length, at racehorse speed. It would dash to the surface, bringing its own and my head out of water, plunge down again, then, as though exhausted, sweep up, turning and tipping in a vain effort to rid itself of its unknown and mysterious enemy.

The turtle had carried me down four or five times in its wild rush, and towed me some distance from the boat, in shallow water, when I heard Long John

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shout something. I could not make out the words, but the next moment I realized their import, as the turtle plunged over the edge of the reef and dived into the deep blue waters of the channel. I made a desperate effort to stop it, but the turtle scented liberty from afar, and plunged down deeper and deeper. I retained my hold until I experienced intensely cold water, perhaps ten feet from the surface, then cast off, and swam upward, to be picked up by my solemn-visaged boatman with the remark, "It's jest like I told you, sah; if you kin stay down yander for twenty minutes, you kin do it." But I could not retain my breath twenty minutes. There are, unfortunately, limitations to this sport on the outer reef.

## CHAPTER III

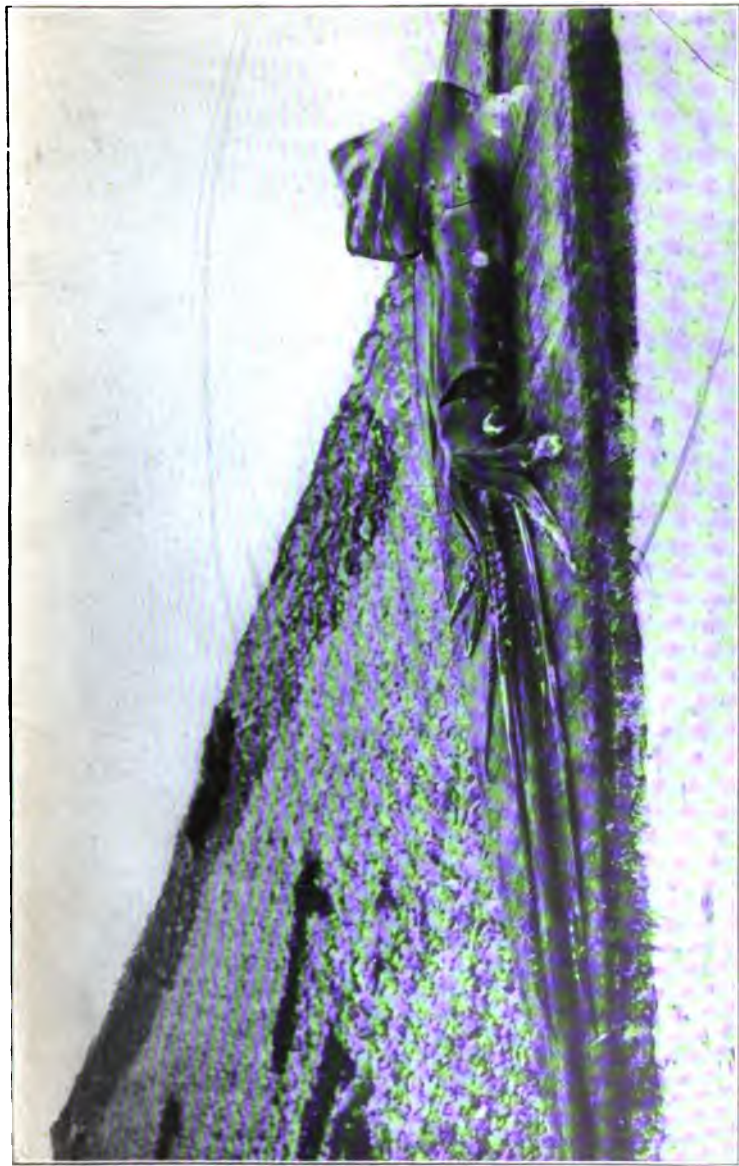
### TEN-ARMED GAME

**T**HAT there was sport of an exciting nature in the capture of a large octopus and its ten-armed ally the squid, which ranges from seven to sixty or seventy feet in length, dawned upon me when spearing specimens on the Florida reefs and among the islands of the California coast. No animal affects the imagination as do these weird uncanny creatures which more resemble a Gorgon's head, with its repellent snakes, than anything else. From early times writers have invested them with horror; painted them as giants of the ocean world; the very church giving sanction to the tales; Bishop Pontoppidan, of Norway, having described and figured squids as krakens—monsters which were mistaken for islands as they lay upon the surface of the sea—while other authors of the past century pictured them as dragging ships down by twisting their snakelike arms about the masts and rigging. In "The Toilers of the Sea" Victor Hugo vividly pictures the ferocity of the tribe; and the names, devil-fish, cuttlefish, became in the public mind synonymous with all that was terrifying and mysterious among

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the denizens of the deep sea. That there was some foundation for these tales became evident several decades ago when giant squids were captured in Newfoundland waters; and later, whalers who follow the sperm whale have shown that the deep sea contains cuttlefishes sixty or seventy feet in length; creatures which, in their make-up, present an appearance at once terrifying and horrible; animals so large, powerful and active that, were they so disposed, a single specimen in open water could, doubtless, play havoc with a number of men, seizing them in its sucker-lined arms and drowning them with comparative ease. The largest specimen actually handled and measured by me was about fifty feet in length, including the long arms, and it would be difficult to conceive a more hideous object. The body is barrel-shaped, with an arrow-shaped tail, and in large individuals weighs a ton or more; the eyes are as large as saucers, black and staring. The head bears eight arms lined on the inner side with sucking saw-like discs; and two longer arms, which in the animal I measured were thirty feet in length, with sucking discs at the tips. Between the base of the arms is the mouth, with a toothed tongue, and a pair of beaks apparently identical in shape and color with those of a parrot, and quite as powerful. The animal's mode of propulsion is to take in water at the gills and eject it violently through the siphon. Thus equipped, with ten snakelike arms, myriads of suckers,



Large Squid Caught at Avalon by C. F. Holder. Santa Catalina Islands.



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the beak of a parrot, a wonderful faculty of changing color, and possessing an ink bag with which fluid it can pollute the immediate waters and hide its retreat, the squid is one of the most remarkable and uncanny members of the animal kingdom. When out of water it is soft and flabby, with little brace for its pliable body, yet in the water it has remarkable strength, and whalers have observed gigantic specimens wrapped about whales, which the latter appeared unable for the moment to dislodge.

Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland, is famous for its giant squids. One discovered upon the surface threw its arms over a boat nearly swamping her. Another came ashore and was secured in shallow water by throwing a grapnel into it, which, in turn, was fastened to a tree on the beach. The struggles of the monster, whose body alone was twenty feet in length, are described as terrible. The ten livid arms were constantly shot into the air, while masses of water discolored with ink, were ejected from the siphon, converting the adjacent water into murky foam. This giant was estimated to be seventy feet in length; and doubtless the deep sea affords a hiding place for larger specimens. To attempt the capture of large uninjured squids is almost impossible. They are timid creatures, undoubtedly dreading the light, and those of great size which have been taken had been injured by whales or some disease; but even if they could be approached very few sportsmen would

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care to try conclusions with an animal possessing ten arms any one of which might whisk a man from the boat and drown him. With the small specimens it is different, though their strength is disproportionate to their size, and a fifteen-foot octopus, or a seven- or eight-foot squid sometimes becomes active game when faced by a single man.

Squids ranging from one to seven or eight feet in length are at times common on the Californian coast. On one occasion, as I was poling along the kelp-lined shores of Santa Catalina Island, spear in hand, I suddenly found myself in the center of a school of them, ranging from four to eight feet in length. The water appeared to be filled with phantom forms darting backward with incredible rapidity, changing direction as quickly, stopping to throw out their tongue-like arms, then dashing into shallow water and entangling themselves in the kelp, chased by a band of fierce tunas that were only stayed by the shallow water. After the *mêlée* I found that there were a dozen or more of the animals dead on the bottom, which were gladly received by the Italian fishermen who salted them down for bait. Three were later secured alive, and with great difficulty placed in a large tank in the zoölogical station, where they lived some hours, to the amazement of the local population, who had never seen so weird an animal; and it is possible that squids of such size were never seen in captivity before. The largest was about



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eight feet in length, with enormous black staring eyes and long tentacles. So powerful was this gelatinous monster that when the tentacles were clasped to the glass of the tank I found it impossible with an oar to pry them off; and it was evident that even these small individuals could easily drown a man in the open sea should they throw their arms about him. The appearance of these confined creatures beggared description. They at once blackened the water in the tank, through which their uncanny eyes gazed at the spectators. They fastened themselves by their suckers to the glass, and pumped water and jets of ink with inconceivable rapidity, keeping the water boiling, and ever and anon throwing the arrow-shaped tail out of the water. But the most extraordinary feature of this entertainment was the appearance of the body of the squids. Its normal color was a dark reddish brown, yet in the strong light it seemed to be the setting of a mimic thunder storm, so far as lightning was concerned, as its entire surface was ever flashing from pure white to all shades of red or brown with more or less rapidity. To test the strength of this animal, I grasped one by its short tentacles and endeavored to wrench it from its position, upon which it coiled snakelike about my arms and resisted every effort, but made no attempt to bite.

In attempting to spear smaller specimens of the squid on the Florida reef, on one occasion I stationed my boatman in the bow, who leaned over with his

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head within two feet of the water, to notify me of the presence of the game which were often to be found in the lagoon, lying near the bottom, simulating it in color. We came upon several squids on the surface, which, alarmed, sent a volume of water and ink fairly into the face of the astonished man, deluging his expressive countenance with streams of sepia, and were away before I could use the grains or spear.

If the squids are uncanny the octopi, or devil-fishes, especially the large specimens, are diabolical in appearance, motion and habits. They are bottom animals, found on the reef in countless numbers and are disturbed by having a man lift or turn a coral branch, when the spiderlike creature is seen lumbering away upon its eight sucker-lined legs. When impaled, it at once becomes enraged and fights until killed. One of the first I caught, literally turned the tables on me. I was wading, spear in hand, in water waist deep, turning over the coral, when seeing what I supposed was a shell, *cyprea*, I thrust my hand under the coral and was immediately seized by something which felt like a ball of snakes. I could feel them climbing up my bare arm, the intensely cold tentacles pressing their suckers into the flesh. I jerked my hand back suddenly, but the concealed animal held me firmly, having grasped the coral with its remaining arms. For a moment I stood with my face at the surface literally in the toils; then dropping the grains pole I reached down and tugged at

## *Ten-Armed Game*

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the coral, the living chains tightening about my hand and creeping up my arm, a most revolting and uncanny sensation. Finally the coral gave way and I hauled twenty pounds, or more, to the surface; then breaking it I grasped my captor by its body and succeeded in wrenching it from its hold. It was evident that a large specimen could give a man a hard struggle, and he would be at a disadvantage in deeper water. This octopus, not over four feet across, sprang to the attack and held my hand in a vise-like grasp. As I tore off one tentacle, another one or two would insidiously creep up and take its place. The body, not larger than my closed hand, was continually changing color, from brown to black, then white, gray and red; its eyes gleaming with a green baneful light, altogether unpleasant, while, from its siphon streams of ink were expelled over my arm, dripping into the water and clouding it for several feet about. As long as I attempted to tear it away the animal renewed the attack, and finally, to prevent disagreeable abrasion on my arm, I held it still in the hot sun when it released its hold and dropped into the boat. Its object seemed to be to press its mouth and bills upon my arm, and this it did continually, and, doubtless, could have made an incision with its parrot-like beaks; but it made no attempt to accomplish this, nor was I ever bitten by the octopi, large and small, which I grasped with my hands in collecting coral.

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On the Florida reef the largest octopus I ever speared was not five feet across—radial spread—but so powerful are they that often when hauling them into the boat they would bring up fifteen or twenty pounds of coral, releasing it at the surface to cling to the boat with a strength that was astonishing in so small an animal.

On the Pacific coast the octopus attains a much larger size, the great *Octopus punctatus* having been found with a radial spread of twenty-five or thirty feet. Many tales are current regarding the ferocity of these creatures which may be taken *cum grano salis*; at least in my experience I have found them timid animals, but in every instance ready to fight the intruder when attacked. The largest specimen I have seen in these waters was fourteen feet across. It was impaled on a trawl hook in five hundred feet of water off Santa Catalina. As it reached the surface it threw its arms over the boat, and as each arm was nearly seven feet in length, and as there were eight of them, they made over fifty feet of twining snakelike objects. The occupants of the boat were for the moment demoralized; but they soon rid themselves of the unwelcome creature, killing it with the oars. Large specimens are often brought up by the San Francisco fishermen, and several have given these toilers of the sea a sensational combat before they released their hold upon arms or legs around which the tentacles were thrown. A resident of Monterey



A Giant California Octopus.



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stated to me that an octopus, at least twenty feet across, was found in a kelp-lined pool near that city, that undoubtedly displayed hostile designs upon him. He was leaping from rock to rock, and in passing a pool a long sinuous arm came, trembling, up from the weed and nearly caught him by the bare leg. He went for assistance, and the monster was finally captured, after resisting the strength of two or three men, although a stout rope had been fastened about its body, which was as large as a man's head. An acquaintance of mine, a naturalist, in collecting shells in the kelp-lined pools near Point Firman, heard the cries of some children, and on running to the spot, saw a large octopus crawling toward them, almost out of the water, raising its tentacles in the air. The children thought that it was chasing them, but undoubtedly cut off by the tide, and alarmed, it was making for deep water. The real danger in such a meeting lies in the horror inspired by the appearance of such a creature and the possible effect upon observers with weak nerves.

In hunting octopi along the rocks of Santa Catalina I found that large specimens came in with the tide, or crept from their dens to the edge of the water to watch for a species of crab that lived at the water line. By peering over the rocks I watched their maneuvers. Sighting a crab sunning itself in fancied security, the octopus would creep along, its body adopting the exact color of the bottom, until it

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reached the very edge of the water. Here it would poise and gather itself, seemingly, like a cat for a spring, drawing back with the waves, then creeping on again; then like a flash of light two or three tentacles would come out of the water and seize the crab, and in a moment the body would follow in a series of horrible convulsions, taking the octopus *entirely out of the water*, and completely encompassing its victim. If the crab escaped, the octopus would sometimes follow it for several feet in a lumbering grotesque fashion and then return. I caught many of these crab-feeding octopi by creeping upon them and grasping them as they lay in wait, and some of the large ones forced me to exert all my strength in tearing them from their hold. To determine their respective fighting qualities I caught a number and confined them in a tank, then inserting my arm under water I would approach them with fingers wide apart. There was the greatest difference in the combativeness of individuals. Some paid no attention to my advance and allowed themselves to be stroked; and one large one I found as readily accepted my gentle scratching between its green eyes as a dog. Others again would advance to meet my hand, throw their arms about it and attempt to drag it beneath the rocks, while one, and the largest, invariably flung itself upon my hand and endeavored to cover it with the finlike membranes which connect the base of the tentacles. This is always the method of attack in



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deep water. The octopus retains its hold upon the bottom with two or three tentacles, seizes the victim with the others, then releasing the anchors, pounces upon its prey, the outspread membranes giving the animal the appearance of a miniature umbrella, which settles down upon the struggling victim as though to smother it, a movement which brings the mouth and biting beaks into position where they presently find a vital part.

At various times I had from three to five devil-fishes in an inclosure, where I could watch them change color and test their strength. In confinement, if the tank bottom was dark, they assumed various tints, generally a dark reddish brown; but the largest one was a tiger-like creature, about three feet across, with a ground of livid white covered with black or dark gray blotches, giving it a truly fiendish appearance, especially as the eyes were conspicuous and appeared to emit lambent gleams. The change of color was marvelous in its rapidity. In a special tank in which two of these prisoners were confined they occupied the corners, facing outward, with arms either coiled under or above them. At any offensive movement on my part, presenting my hand under water, the color scheme would change. A blush appeared to pass over the entire surface; and in a large squid I can only compare it to heat lightning, a rapid and continued series of flushing and paling, from deep brick red to gray. It was very evident

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that the animals differ much in pugnacity. Some did not resent my touching them; others merely threw a tentacle in my direction, while one never touched me, but directed its siphon at my hand under water and sent a violent current in that direction, apparently endeavoring to blow my hand away. It was fascinating to observe the "range" this water gun had, and how by seeming intuition the devil-fish could direct it at my hand as I slowly moved it about while attempting to attract the animal's attention in an opposite direction. The assumption was almost irresistible that the siphon just beneath the eye, had a sense of its own, and could be directed at my hand and made to follow it while the eyes of the octopus were looking in another direction. But the latter are elevated, and doubtless not a move of my hand (a supposititious enemy), which was passed about and around it in the tank, was lost to this uncanny chameleon of the sea.

This devil-fish, that flushed and danced about in the water, assuming strange postures—now crouching in a corner, now poised midway—was in a sense indifferent to me; but with the tiger, the black and white chameleon, he of the stripes, spots, and blotches, the approach of my hand under water was a menace, and all his movements were essentially cat- or tiger-like. Perhaps you have seen a lynx, wildcat, or mountain lion creeping upon its prey or preparing to jump when treed. There is a concen-

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tration of legs, trembling muscles, constant stepping of the feet in a limited area, bending of the back and switch of the tail, long or short. In this devil-fish eight arms coiled about it like snakes, trembled and vibrated as I thrust my hand down into its den. Colors raced over it as I bent over and watched it closely from the outside, where I could see through the polished plate glass every movement, throb, and change. At a distance of eight inches I could feel the curious current of water shot at my hand by the torpedo-like siphon; see the delicate weed in the water blown aside; and as my hand approached nearer and nearer the octopus crouched low, like a cat, its eight arms fumbling inanely, a trembling, Medusa-like object. Nearer came my hand, and like a flash of lightning, so sudden that it was startling, the octopus shot out one of its arms, that like a snake or lariat seemed to be flung at me, the rings of the end suckers striking my hand sharply, the entire animal springing forward. To brace itself, it threw one arm to the right, one below, one to the left, fastened by many suckers to the glass, while two others, as the sequel will show, seized its companion.

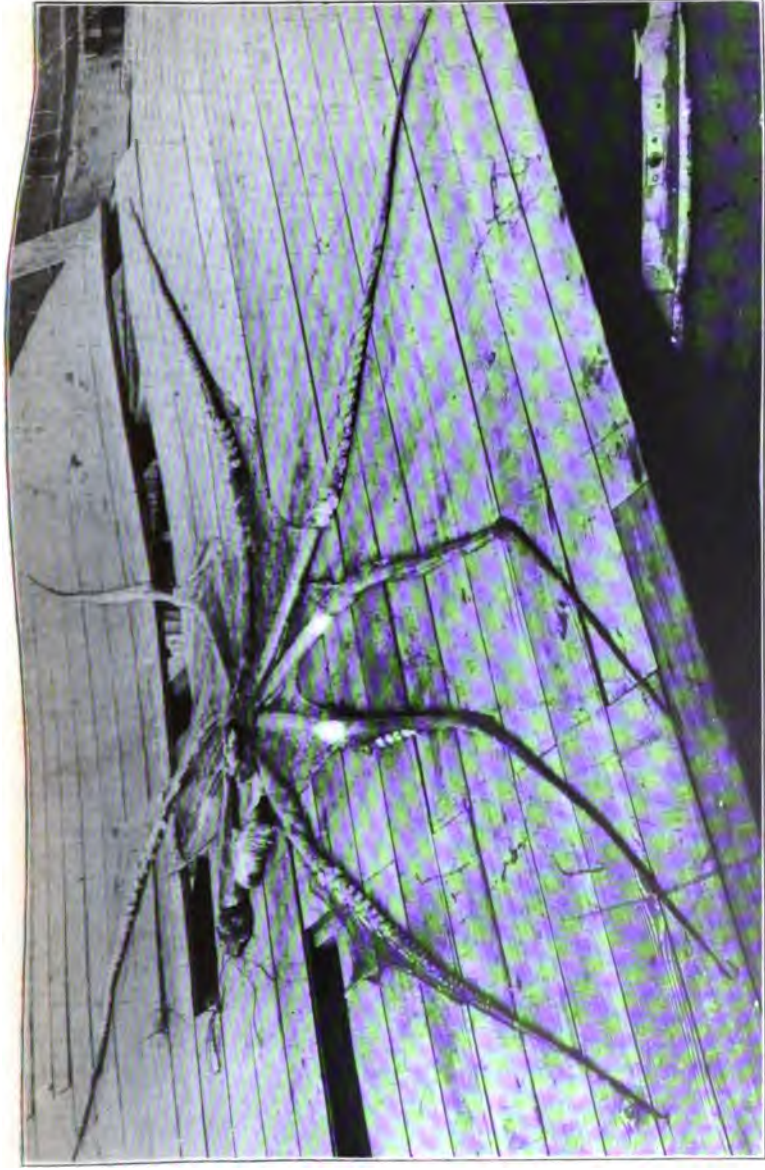
I now gradually withdrew my hand from what may be considered the attack, and then advanced it, and doubtless to the devil-fish the situation was momentous and alarming. It crouched a moment, moving forward and back, then launched itself bodily at the enemy (my hand), striking it with sev-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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eral tentacles, dropping back quickly and crouching for another spring, the action so sudden and forceful, so startling, that the corner octopus sprang into the clear water and for a moment literally danced, floated, or poised, uncertain which way to go, then dropped to its corner again, rendering itself as inconspicuous as possible.

Again I retreated; the big devil-fish meantime crouching and spreading itself out, color melting into color, tint, and shade over its broad back, directing its siphon stream at its companion. I again advanced, pointing my finger at the animal and moving to within a foot of it. I could see it darken, take on a deep red hue, and then it flung itself bodily at my hand, and endeavored to cover it by a peculiar encompassing motion designed to smother it. A crab or fish is taken in this way, the web being spread over it, shutting the victim in its arms, and the scores of suckers forcing it to the mouth, where the nipping black parrot-like beak is brought into play. But the smothering action is invariable; suggestive and horrifying if we imagine it attempted by an animal thirty feet across. To meet this leap, holding the hand steady, and grasping the octopus, is a nerve-test to a novice. I confess that it was distinctly disagreeable to me, though I have caught and handled many of these animals of various sizes; but I held the devil-fish which gradually enveloped my entire hand, and by grasping it firmly I pressed my little finger over



Giant Octopus, Fifteen Feet Across, Caught at Santa Catalina Islands.



## *Ten-Armed Game*

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its bills, my palm over its eyes, and held it with all my strength. The animal held me tightly with one tentacle over my thumb, another through my fingers, and bracing itself by throwing out three anchors below, which caught the bottom and two sides of the tank, and three behind.

I now endeavored to complete my pseudo-victory by lifting the octopus, but I could not tear this small animal from the sides. The devil-fish held on, pumping a stream of ink at me in its rage. By using my other hand I finally succeeded in prying it off; then I pretended to be caught and tried to release it. But the warlike chameleon of the sea would have none of it. It threw its tentacles about my hand, pulled it slowly down into the corner, covered it as well as it could, but did not bite me. If my hand had been a crab, fish, or other octopus, it would have been attacked and bitten, but for some reason it did not attempt it; in a word, the animal was perfectly harmless, which I knew; there was only a slight scratch on my hand to tell the story, and this was received when I wrenched it away.

This was a laughable conclusion to the threatening and warlike movements of the octopus. The animal, in point of fact, was a "bluffer," and well calculated to demoralize one not acquainted with its limitations. I know of no animal that has the power, by mere attitudinizing and the assumption of menacing gestures, to inspire the same degree of horror in the spec-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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tator not familiar with it. This was illustrated when I requested an attendant when displaying this octopus to explain to visitors that it was perfectly harmless, then to enrage it, and ask spectators to take it out of the tank and place it in another, a substantial inducement being offered in one instance. But among the many observers not one could be found who would touch the quivering, color-changing creature poised for its harmless spring; the terror inspired was complete and intense.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE AMBER JACKS

**D**OWN along the Florida coast, beginning with the splendid beach of Fernandina, the sea rolls in with tireless energy and laves the sands with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, the vast volume passing through the narrow channel and widening out in the North Atlantic. There is hardly a rock or stone to be found along shore, and the highest point, in all probability, from New York to Cape Florida, is a diminutive hill near the beach, which I have often climbed at Pilottown on the St. John's.

The beaches vary much in general appearance to the close observer. In one place they are wide, the sea retreats at the ebb tide a remarkable distance, and the stroller along the sands can wade out a long way in shallow water, and ships that are wrecked at high tide are high and dry at the ebb. Again the beach is abrupt and precipitous. The area of breakers is narrow and soon reaches deep water. On the north side of the St. John's the channel comes suddenly in shore, and on the south the sand dunes are ever changing, like the island of Anacapa. In calms they

## *Big Game at Sea*

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lie like sleeping monsters, huge krakens hauled upon the sands basking in the sun; but should the wind rise they begin to move and a single day will so change them that the landscape of one day is blotted out and replaced by another.

I have followed these dunes from the Jersey shore down nearly to the mouth of the Rio Grande, and they are everywhere fascinating in their shapes and habit. Along the Texas and lower Florida coasts a strange outer bar has formed, a long attenuated ridge of sand, a series of islands formed by the so-called passes, as Aransas, in Texas. On the Florida coast this outside reef, island or sandy barrier forms the so-called Indian River that lies between it and the mainland, making possible some of the finest fishing in the south. The beach of the outside island is often wide, a splendid hard boulevard, and again deep water approaches the shore and many kinds of big fish come in.

At the mouth of the St. John's I have had sport with the channel bass, sea trout, call him what you will, but for the really hard fighter of the east coast of Florida one should try the waters near Palm Beach, Lake Worth Inlet, Miami and various regions in the vicinity of Biscayne Bay and from there down the reef to Key West, and camp on the trail of the amber jack. Palm Beach is perhaps the most convenient place to try this fish and one of the best grounds, as this fine game for some reason comes in here so

## *The Amber Jacks*

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near shore that it is taken from the dock at times. But the best fishing is some distance off the beach, anchored in a small boat beyond the breaking of the swell.

The amber jack doubtless frequents the deeper waters of the Gulf Stream here, and its appearance so near shore is merely a foraging trip, as in localities where small boats can lie along the submerged reefs further down the coast the fine fishes may often be seen swimming along the reef in deep water.

We may imagine ourselves shoving off some fine morning, the men skillfully pulling the boat through the surf and anchoring off the sands where the amber jacks are known to be. The air is soft, and the wind, what there is, is warm. The boatmen are blacks who know the country well, and the boat is soon anchored in a spot where some unknown angler in the past hooked a fish that towed his boat far out into the Gulf Stream before it was gaffed.

The equipment for the sport is a 16-ounce rod with a single tip, a tuna or tarpon reel, holding 600 feet of 21- or 24-thread line, a mere thread one might think with which to play so large a fish, but not found wanting. The bait, a live "spot," is cast thirty or forty feet away, and the anticipating part of the sport is begun. The current is strong and sweeps the bagging line, and ever and anon the click will sound a note and the angler's pulse will start and throb; but when this has happened several times

## *Big Game at Sea*

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and found to be the current, or a jellyfish sagging on the line, the angler quiets down and views the landscape o'er—the long line of sandy beach, the groups of palms, and off at sea the deep blue waters of the mighty current sweeping on, freighted with semi-tropic treasures for other and distant lands.

The boatman is telling of certain catches he has seen when, like an electric shock, comes the sharp staccato of the click. There is no mistaking it; no tide rip here. And see! look! the line stiffens, straightens out like a wire, trembles a second, throwing the water in crystal drops, and then the game is given the butt and the reel screams, high and low, as the unknown jerks the line away in long and splendid bursts of speed.

There is always the thought that it may be a shark or a ray, or some undesirable vermin, but you have taken the amber jack before and its sturdy cousin of the California islands and there is no mistake about it.

Springing to your feet, with the butt of the rod firmly in the leather socket around your waist, you see what a game fish can do, what splendid strength is brought into play as it races away, dragging the line from beneath your thumb and the heavy brake, seemingly playing with it.

Fifty, one hundred, two hundred feet of line slip away before the fish is stopped, and then it appears to strike heavy determined blows at the rod, sweep-

## *The Amber Jacks*

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ing around in a splendid half circle, the line cutting the water and the fish rising with a peculiar motion.

Amber jacks have been hooked here that no man could stop; in the language of the boatman, "they simply walked away with the line," then when the end came never stopped; and there is seemingly no limit to the powers of this fellow.

The angler has a start, the thumb brake of leather stops the run and the big reel begins the pitiless work, and while the jack races it is insensibly coming in all the time. More than once it realizes this and plunges down, and if the water is deep enough, sulks and bores like a salmon and with ten times its force. But the water is comparatively shallow, and the game can only break away and dash off fifty feet to be checked again and again. But it never really surrenders, never really discovers that it is in the toils. Like its cousin, the California yellowtail, it fights until it is in the boat, and even then I have seen a fish double and send itself whirling out of a barrel into the freedom of the sea.

The angler can now see the jack as it races around the boat, and the black boatman fingers his gaff ready to give it the quietus. Nearly thirty minutes have slipped away, and the attempts of the oarsman to keep the angler stern first to the fish and the powerful rushes have carried the boat out from shore where the fish has plenty of water. The man at the rod begins to feel that he has earned his fish. In box-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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ing, fencing or broadsword play there is a "let up," time for rest, but in this duel with the amber jack it is all one round, and arms and fingers are stiff and ache. Pressing the thumb on a leather pad for half an hour, holding a stiff rod in one position, is deadly, and the amber jack appears to have taken its second wind. Perhaps there is a third wind for amber jacks, as suddenly, when coursing along at the surface it apparently sees the boat and goes crazy, plunging down to the mad acclaim of the reel, tearing off the hard-won line and carrying despair into the angler's soul.

But this is the beginning of the end, and holding the rod and line firmly the angler dips the point to the surface and lifts, "mans the pumps," lifts for all he is worth, gains three feet on the sulker, then dropping the tip, reels rapidly; and so ever repeating the trick—the only remedy when fishes will sulk—he regains his lost line and has the splendid fish in sight again. There is a flash of silver, yellow and green, a display of surface below the resilient rod, then the reel works it on to the quarter, and as the patch of color surges, hissing along, the negro gaffer drops his weapon quietly, skillfully under the fish and lifts it just under the gills, holds it firmly for a moment while the spray and spume fly, then depressing the rail, he slides the gallant fighter in, where it hammers the bottom as the angler perchance swings his hat to some distant and less fortunate friend still



**Author Fishing for Yellowtail (Amber Fish) at Santa Catalina.**

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## *The Amber Jacks*

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at anchor. These are the moments of joy in the life of the angler, and surely life is not a failure along the Gulf Stream and is worth living.

The boatman gives the fish the quietus and holds it up, a sort of giant bluefish, and indeed a cousin, but a fish of entirely different mold. It is about five feet long; the scale limit is sixty, and the indicator as the fish is hooked on goes down with a sag, suggesting that eighty pounds is more like it. The amber jack is nicely proportioned, calling to mind the bluefish, but the head is larger in proportion to the body, and solid, and the body is thick and high beneath the dorsal. The dorsal fin extends nearly to the tail and has a streak of gold in it like that of the California yellowtail, its Pacific cousin. The side fins are dusky and gold; the ventrals dark, even black, and vivid yellow. All the under surface is a vivid silver blazing in the sunlight, while the upper surface is green or amber in the water, flashing blue when out and presenting a blaze of iridescence often as the fish dies. Few fishes so impress one with their evident power and sturdiness as this amber jack which the ichthyologists call *Seriola lalandi*; a fish which averages twenty-five pounds and in its prime tips the scales at over one hundred.

Later when four or five jacks have been added to the score they are taken in, the largest one weighing nearly seventy pounds, all in all one of the finest fishes of the summer seas.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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At Palm Beach there is much rivalry in the amber jack field, and some splendid records are held by the gentlemen who fish there. Mr. Wm. Lawrence Green held the record for many seasons with an 81½-pound fish which he killed after a hard struggle. This record was beaten by Mr. J. B. Caldwell, who in 1905 took an amber jack with a 21-thread line, rod and reel, that weighed 92 pounds; and this may be said to be near the limit. Mr. Green stated that he fished the amber jack waters for five years before he made his record of 81½. Some of Mr. Green's fish weighed as follows: In March, 1904, No. 1, 46 inches, weight 34 pounds; No. 2, 50 inches long, weight 42½ pounds; No. 3, 60 inches, weight 67½ pounds; No. 4, 61 inches, weight 67 pounds; No. 5, 60 inches in length, weight 81½ pounds.

My own amber jack fishing has been mainly on the extreme outer reef, and for several seasons I was content with one fish of good size. Long, East, Garden, Bird, Middle, Sand and Loggerhead Keys rose directly in the Gulf Stream that came sweeping up from Yucatan and the winter home of the tarpon. The water was beautiful in tint and tone, and the reef of branch coral stretched away for miles, cut here and there by vivid blue channels, the type of all that is beautiful in color. The water was filled with delicate forms of jelly fish, the fairy-like *Physophora* with its blaze of colors, the luminous colonies of *Pyrosoma* and chains of *Salpa*. I had fished for

## *The Amber Jacks*

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days for the elusive amber jack along these submarine gardens and without luck, until one day while trolling with live mullet, the strike came and the sport was on.

It is difficult to find any fish with which to compare this fish, its power and strength are so great. I was hardly aware that I had hooked it; my line was deep in the heart of the channel, and suddenly the amber fish had me in its toils, racing away with the light dinghy and 300 feet of line, evidently reaching the bottom to come pulsating up to the surface with great throbs easily felt on the line, to stop when checked and give back blow for blow.

The amber jack of the Pacific Coast is the great game fish of the people in Southern California waters, where it is known as amber fish, but more particularly as yellowtail (*Seriola dorsalis*). It is longer, more slender, the head not so large and the body not so thick, and there are no dusky spots nor lines; the fins yellow as gold, and a stripe down the side of gleaming yellow. The upper surface is green or amber, the belly silver. The yellowtail ranges from fifteen to seventy pounds here and comes in from the deep water in March or April and remains about the islands from San Clemente to Santa Catalina or San Nicolas until December. I have taken them from the wharf at Avalon Bay nearly every month in the year; but they are not supposed to be here in the two cold months and are generally absent. But in

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the months named, or in May, they suddenly appear in large well-broken schools, soon breaking up into smaller ones. Then the sport begins, not for the expert few, but for all the people who may fish, and in July or August one of the most remarkable fishing sights to be seen anywhere is staged off the placid waters of Avalon Bay, Santa Catalina. Here possibly two hundred boats may be seen, the anglers, with rod and reel, fishing for the game yellowtail or amber jack. They are anchored about twenty feet apart, and form a compact floating town or assembly, fishing in water of the deepest blue about one hundred feet or more in depth just at the entrance of the bay. Now and then comes a shout and a boat cuts loose from the throng and is rowed or towed away, and the angler is seen to be in the toils, the fish jerking the rod down to the water's edge in sharp blows while the reel sings.

There is nothing, at least in these waters, quite like this splendid rush, fairly demoralizing to some. I have seen a man jerked from a pier by such a fish. Another on receiving the strike was seized with a species of buck fever and trembled so that the fish ran away with all the line—600 feet—and would have taken the rod had I not gone to the rescue; yet these fishes average but seventeen to twenty-five pounds. I have seen one that weighed eighty pounds, and the largest catch with a rod is, I believe, fifty-one pounds.



**Skip Jacker Bonito, Southern California.**



## *The Amber Jacks*

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The yellowtail is so common in these waters that if fished for in the eastern fashion with handlines, a boatload could be taken; but the nine-ounce rod and number-nine line prevails, and fifteen or twenty minutes are devoted to the catch which comes slowly up through the blue water like a star. Four or five such fishes satisfy the most ardent angler along these isles of eternal summer.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIOGRAPHY OF A MAN-EATER\*

**I**T was down on the Pagos reef, where the green melts suddenly into seas of turquoise, that the man-eater first saw light. He was born amid scenes of blood and sudden death; ushered into the world amid pitiless attack, and saved, of all the hellish brood, by the swirl of waters, the uplifted sand cloud, caused by savage kinsmen in their ruthless charge and cannibalistic feast.

His first act was a drama in the struggle for existence. There was no one to teach him how to swim, to breathe, to see, and instinct, that inheritance of the ages, bade him lie limp and motionless. Being of the same color as the sandy bottom, a livid tawny gray, he crouched, and was buried by the shroud of falling particles as they sifted down through the green and opalescent water.

He was about one foot in length, lank, pliable, soft and tender. He did not have a bone in his body, indeed never had; he was an embryo killing machine

\*This article in its entirety is fiction, a study of the man-eater; yet every incident is based on my observations of sharks covering many years, and I give it as a possible history of a typical shark of the open sea.



## *The Biography of a Man-Eater*

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of gristle, with just the suggestion of sharp teeth around his jaws.

For hours he lay, a mound on the sand, resting easily on his big pad-like pectoral fins and tail that fell over upon his side; then as darkness came, he moved restlessly, flung his tail to one side, and was surprised to find that he shot forward and found himself in midwater. He could move, was buoyant; then fear came again, and alarmed at his exposed position, afraid of he knew not what, he swung the limp tail, shot ahead and ran blindly beneath the edge of a wall of projecting branch coral which formed a *cheval de frise* to the channel. No more fortunate position could have been selected; indeed, it was prophetic of the good luck which followed the man-eater all his life.

The jagged points of the coral were so many bayonets over his recumbent body. He had found a snug harbor, and that it was safe was evident by the numbers of crawfish which occupied a similar position along the line, brandishing their serrated whips and assuming an air of hostility and bravery which was the merest presumption.

As night came on the young shark shifted from side to side, working the sand out so that he could lie with ease, gradually forming a nest in the soft sand the shape of his yielding body. His eyes, which were of the exact shade of his skin, but spotted with black, now began to take in objects near at hand.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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He was terrified at the strange sights, which, as the darkness deepened, flashed and scintillated in every direction; now as starlike objects, again as comets pulsating on through the water with a fiery train; and as large fishes surged by, the entire mass of water blazed with such a golden radiance that the young man-eater fell back against the coral of his den trembling and quivering with fear.

The very bottom of the sea was paved with wonders. Small animals bored their way upward through the sand emitting a spark of light, which grew and expanded, out of which darted a firebody which made its undulating way to the surface. There were strange noises—crashing, tumbling concussions now and then, which shook the ledge, and ever and anon the water about him moved and the delicate fire-like jelly fishes seemed to sway to one side. It was a night of terror to the young shark, thrust into the world defenseless and half made up.

All night he lay quietly, now and again prodded by the serrated spine of an inquisitive crawfish, while once a sprawling many-armed octopus crossed over him—a nerve-racking sensation—as this infant man-eater had nerves, and realized it until he was six feet in length, when they gradually became obliterated. In time the light of day came and he observed that the water over him was much lower than it had been; it had dropped away, as it were, and then seeing that he was partly covered by sand, he fell asleep

## *The Biography of a Man-Eater*

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and did not awaken for some hours when he saw that the water over him was deeper, that in some way it had risen.

He now began to feel like trying his tail again, and the sandy plain being clear, he twisted about, flinging his tail boldly to one side, and rose high into the clear spot, so high, indeed, that he became alarmed as the field of vision opened up, and ducking his head, swung the remarkable tail from side to side and plunged down, so rapidly that he ran his head into the sand and lay there, frightened and dazed. But the motion was too delightful to resist, and again he gave the long swing and rose upward, then allowing himself to drop he found that he was balanced to such a nicety, that when he moved his tail he sped directly ahead and so fell into a swing from side to side and moved on and on.

The white sand led gradually upward with coral on all sides, and as he wandered on, he observed that the smaller inhabitants of the place fled from him. He suddenly came upon a very high and beautifully colored fish twice his own size, and was about to drop to the bottom and hide, when he was amazed to see the angel-fish dart away. Then for the first time there crept into the man-eater's brain the idea that he was a power, that for some reason he was dreaded and feared, and at once his side swing became a swagger and he shot through the water with such rapidity that he rose up the side of the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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sandy slope and came into a region of delights, his home or ranging ground for many a day.

He felt the water moving over him in waves. He could see that it was now and then breaking, forming a foam that was hurled downward with such force that the water all about him was filled with minute globules or particles which, when he breathed, seemed to fill him with new life and vigor. His gills opened and shut rapidly, and with difficulty he restrained the desire to surge ahead at full speed and test his powers. He was now moving over great coral heads tinted with olive and dotted and spangled over their surfaces with brilliant flowerlike objects. On every side were gorgeous plumes waving to and fro, some in brown, some in yellow, while clumps of reticulated fans of vivid yellow and lavender added to the brilliancy of the scene. Amid these objects were countless small fishes, all in radiant colors. Lying on the sand were long brown shapes, like worms, and blooming from every crevice were flowerlike anemones, their petals moving gracefully in tidal measure. The sea floor over which the young man-eater swam was set with a mosaic of algæ: masses of scarlet, blocks of tender green, bits of blue, yellow and white; every dead coral rock, every vantage ground being painted in splendid hues.

But the man-eater saw none of these. He swam heavily on until, exhausted, he fell into the friendly vase-like shape of a huge head of coral and lay pant-

## *The Biography of a Man-Eater*

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ing beneath a great lavender-hued gorgonia. For two days he was caged here, not having the strength or intelligence to rise upward and escape. On the second day a young crawfish fell upon his head and instinctively the jaws of the young man-eater opened and closed upon the victim. A crunching sound, and the shark, tasting flesh, scenting prey, swung himself about, shaking the morsel as a dog would a rat, tossing the mud high above the surface of the head, clouding the water, out of which he rose. He had eaten, tasted blood, though white, and from now on his one object was to destroy.

For several months he lived this life, slowly making his way over the splendid tropical floor of the ocean, sleeping at times in the crevices of rocks, or between coral heads, or under them, foraging where he could, darting clumsily upon octopi, crabs, even starfishes, or any miserable creature which could offer no resistance, thus early in life displaying his sordid nature. The young shark never left the shallows, and at the end of a year, nurtured on good diet, had materially enlarged. He was now three feet in length; his tail long and powerful, his body noticeably bulky. But the greatest change was in the mouth. The first row of teeth was well defined, sharp and serrated. The eye was a little larger, but still the color of sand paper, with no expression. He had begun to change his diet. He discovered that crawfish and other crustaceans went out on the shal-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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low flats at night to feed, and that rays came there to hunt them; so one night, instead of coiling up in a coral head, the man-eater, following a little channel through the reef at high tide, swam across a lagoon of sand overgrown by short sea-weed. Conchs were lumbering along on this grassy floor, and in the submarine herbage were big yellow crawfish, tough and dangerous.

Suddenly there came floating along a ray with its birdlike motion. As it drew near, the shark rushed blindly upon it and by sheer bulldog ferocity seized and held it. The ray lashed the enemy with its whip-like tail, then doubled and flung its sharp serrated spines against the shark, inflicting a wound that was followed by a pink cloud that slowly permeated the water. The beadlike expressionless eyes of the man-eater turned inward almost out of sight, but in no way did he exhibit pain; he held on, gripping harder, scenting the blood fiercely, tasting the flesh of his victim. When the ray became passive he swung it, gripped it again, and bearing down upon it, tore and lacerated it, striking down the weed with powerful blows of his tail, sending the crawfishes dashing across the submarine mesa.

Engaged in this fierce attack, the man-eater was suddenly struck, knocked aside by a sand-shark twice his size; but he circled about with savage menace, retreating only when fairly put to flight by his opponent. Every night now he foraged, learning that

## *The Biography of a Man-Eater*

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nearly all animals feed at night in this land of plenty. In all his wanderings the man-eater never exhibited any interest in a certain locality; he never returned to the same place twice. He had no sense of location, no mental action that gave him an interest in any part of the reef sufficient to produce a desire to return, no memory beyond that which blood produced. He slept or rested when he grew weary, and often swam continuously for days; at times at the surface, when his fin would make broad showing above the water, cutting it like a knife. He swam on, eternally on, but generally in a circle—an instinctive movement, which kept him near the lagoon.

At the end of three years the man-eater was six feet in length. He had increased prodigiously in bulk, was especially heavy just behind the head which was enormous and threatening. When his jaws gaped, as they sometimes did to throw out some parasite, an array of teeth would be seen, the front row upright, pure white, larger than a man's thumb-nail and perfect triangles, their edges like saws. Back of these were ten or twelve rows of similar teeth lying flat in the mouth, unsuspected, but called into action when blood was tasted and some victim attempted to escape; then all these fierce knives sprang erect and sank into the flesh of the enemy making escape impossible.

The shark had changed in many essentials. He was lighter in color, nearly white beneath; the upper

## *Big Game at Sea*

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lobe of the tail was longer, lithe and capable of remarkable power; but the eyes now appeared smaller and were, if anything, more inexpressive, and gray. Its motion was dignified, yet there was the same peculiar swing given by the tail, and when he wished to turn, the massive head was jerked slightly in the given direction and the tail swung to meet it. He had now several boon companions. Three or four remoras had joined partnership with him, fishes about a foot in length, black, with a peculiar sucker on the top of the head. When weary of following the shark they merely attached themselves by the sucker to his back and were towed along. The others were several little striped pilot-fishes, which hid beneath the shark's head. They were very curious and darted out at every strange object that appeared.

The man-eater at this time had developed a remarkable power of scent. A dead animal half a mile away could be traced up the wind or current with marvelous quickness and fidelity. His plan when a scent was found was to beat up against it like a ship against the wind, swimming with great rapidity, turning the instant it was lost; and as this was always on the surface, with his big dorsal fin out of water, he was not a pleasing sight to men in a boat who had left their fish hanging overboard. The spectacle of a shark of extraordinary bulk darting about in so erratic a manner was taken by some as menacing, and they resented it in various ways.



## *The Biography of a Man-Eater*

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All this time the man-eater had remained in one general section, not straying beyond a radius of five miles, but as years passed he became a wanderer, and when about fifteen feet, or more, in length, like a very ghost compared to the nurse sharks he once slept near in the lagoon, he left shallow water and took to the open sea. It was about this period that the shark became a public character. He began to swim up and down the reef taking as his route that of many of the coast steamers, ranging from about the latitude of Charleston to Key West, at times crossing the Gulf Stream.

It is not to be supposed that he had gained any idea of locality. He haunted this region merely because he had certain limitations. He swam north until the water lost the temperature which suited his nature best, and to the south until it grew too warm. A certain skipper of a steamer which sailed from a northern port sighted the shark early in 1861 off Cary's Foot Light, the shark following the steamer for several hours, his dorsal fin high above water, crossing and recrossing the steamer's wake in a peculiarly rapid manner. For three consecutive trips the shark was observed, and then one of the passengers fired at him cutting a notch out of his dorsal fin, by which the shark was known for years, nearly always being sighted in the run from Cape Florida to Havana. The shark was named "Old Bill," and there was not a superstitious sailor on the run who

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had not taken a shot at him or attempted to capture him.

The man-eater could not be induced to take a baited hook, and it was believed by many of the men that he followed the vessel waiting for a wreck; and when a certain ship disappeared in a hurricane and went down with all on board in the Florida Strait, it was said that "Old Bill" went down with her. In any event, he disappeared for months. He was now eighteen feet long, of enormous bulk. He rarely went north of Hatteras and then only in summer, when he followed the shad schools north, making the turn at Long Island in June and the coast of Maine some time later in summer. His habits had changed. He preyed upon dead animals, had become a scavenger, and would follow a cattle ship half way across the ocean to feed upon a dead steer. He appeared to be too heavy to run down a horse mackerel, and the smaller fishes evaded him altogether, though occasionally he found a school of mackerel surrounded by a net and would dash into them, crazed by the scent of blood and slime, and gorge himself with them.

He was utterly insensible to pain, as while entangled in a net he was lanced several times by an infuriated fisherman; but the men noticed that he did not stop eating, paying no attention to the wounds; and when his size was seen, the skipper ordered the men aboard the schooner. On another occasion when entangled in a net near Gloucester, five miles off

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shore, he destroyed it, rolling over and over, biting the net, tearing it into countless pieces. A doryman attacked him with a harpoon upon which he turned savagely, gripped the cutwater in his teeth, nearly crushing it and lifting the boat several feet. The men pulled off at a glimpse of his size, and the next day some of his teeth were found in the planking.

One summer he came up the coast searching for some cattle steamer, but finding none he swam on, and attracted by the fishing boats, followed several. Food was scarce. Horse mackerel eluded him. One day he ate a huge jelly fish in desperation, and next seized and rent a mass of kelp in which a dead fish was wound, which brought on a frenzy for food and blood. A schooner was fishing near by, and as the men hauled up fish, he would take them off, carrying away the lines and filling his mouth with hooks to which he paid little attention. Finally the fishing stopped and he came to the surface some distance off and seeing a dory anchored, swam up to it, then circled around it. His appearance must have terrified the man for he grasped an oar and struck at the shark shouting for help. It was said later that the shark deliberately tried to tip over the boat by rising beneath it; but it is an historical fact that over a dozen men and women on the schooner saw the man-eater rush at the dory, rise over it amidships, saw the unfortunate man waving his arms, then saw him strike at the shark with the oar; but the man-

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eater fell partly on the dory, crushing it down, and then both disappeared. This incident occurred off Nahant, and for several summers the shark haunted the New England coast and the Gulf of Maine. He repeatedly attempted to capsize boats off Boon Island, and terrorized the dory cod fishermen and others by rising beneath them and swimming about their boats. The "Big Shark" under which alias he was known, is still remembered by the old fishermen of the coast.

The shark had earned his title of "man-eater" beyond question, and his nature changed with the acquirement. Though starving at times he haunted vessels, paying little attention to the large migrating schools of fish which most sharks follow up and down the coast. In his soggy brutal mind he associated ships and this new game, and the small gray eyes had learned to distinguish between the animate and inanimate parts of a vessel; a floating, rippling flag over the stern of a propeller did not deceive or attract, but men who were hanging in the chains or over the rail painting or scraping ship sometimes saw a strange but mighty shadow below them and crawled aboard, terror stricken, with an undefined fear.

The man-eater had at one time been quick of motion, a swift hunter. He had learned the tricks and customs of the fishes. He knew when the bluefish migrated, the millions of shad came in from the deep submarine plateau upon which they win-

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tered, and with others he had followed them, lurking about the mouths of rivers, often creeping in, devouring other sharks or eating the hundreds of shad in nets. He lurked about the gulf-coast islands for some time and laid in wait for the silver king, the tarpon that came up from the South American coast in February, and he soon learned to watch until a fisherman had hooked a tarpon, and more than one will recall feeling a sudden strain and seeing a huge white-bellied figure rise five feet with the tarpon quivering in his maw. Again he followed the horse mackerel in the spring, lurching along far beneath them, yet keen on their scent, following the peculiar oily exudations from their scales which followed them for miles, as a hound would a fresh trail, making rushes at night and often running a school inshore, losing them on the sands where the fishermen lanced them and wondered why they came ashore.

This and more the great shark had done, but now his enormous bulk, his slow movements suggested a different life; the huge creature had reached the demoniacal climax of his development. He had fourteen or more rows of white serrated, knifelike teeth; he moved with great deliberation, and was apparently incapable of rapid movement; but this was not altogether true, the shark was really a type of activity. He could dart ahead or from side to side, or turn upon his side with matchless grace, but he rarely did; he now plowed slowly along search-

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ing for the objects which suggested the game of his choice.

It was this change of habit that made the great white man-eater an ocean wanderer. He avoided the shore and attached himself to a large ship which sailed from Boston to Liverpool; trailed it, like a hound on the scent, for days; laid by it in storms and calms, and every bucket of refuse thrown over brought the man-eater up from astern with a rush. He finally lost the trail of this ship in chasing something which was thrown over, and was a thousand miles or more at sea. He swam in every direction, hoping to pick up her scent or wake; now madly, again swimming slowly. He dived down a quarter of a mile, searching for the bottom which was three miles beyond, but was driven up by the cold to swim along the surface on calm days.

The marvelous turquoise tints of the ocean's heart, its splendid virile life, its strength, its ponderous movements, its silvery tracery, the frosting of the sea as it broke, made no impression upon his sodden brain. The wonderful illumination of the sea at night, its real comets and constellations of vivid phosphorescence were not seen by him as he moved along. It mattered little to this blood hunter that the ocean was a realm of beauties, that each crystal drop was buoyant with life and countless lovely forms. He failed to note the splendors of the huge jellies whose tentacles of living lace brushed over him in a cloud

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of color—lavender, blue and pink—all were unseen by this incarnate appetite without sensation or desire beyond carnage.

Swimming aimlessly along one day, the shark crossed a familiar scent. Several Mother Cary's chickens were fluttering over the surface after some substance foreign to the clear waters. At once the great bulk shot into action. It rushed across the line, caught the scent, lost it, turned savagely and caught it again, then dashed on into the wake of a great ship bound for Rio. For days he followed, now astern, again lurching along the quarter with one ugly eye cast upward; again sailing along the surface, his big dorsal fin cutting the water. He was fired at; hooks were tossed over baited with salt pork, but the man-eater paid no attention to them. He crossed the line with the ship, grew gaunt and ugly, and was forced to catch a porpoise or starve, so well did the wind hold, and finally entered the harbor at Rio and failed miserably in an attempt to capsize the boat of a pilot.

Meeting an outgoing steamer, the man-eater trailed it up the coast to Barbadoes. Here he found a small sailing vessel bound to the westward, and so reached Aspinwall in the Caribbean Sea. The water was intensely hot and he lay out in deep water, cooling his massive bulk, during the day, going inshore at night, occasionally chasing the great rays whose leap from and return to the water sounded like the discharge of a cannon.

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One day the shark entered the harbor late in the afternoon and swam in the direction of the anchorage, a huge uncanny menace. The crew of one ship were in bathing. They had a topgallant sail overboard and were swimming in it suspecting the presence of sharks. The man-eater swam beneath and around it and was seized with a frenzy at the scent that drifted away. He began to swim rapidly, first in one direction, then in another, circling the ship about twenty feet below the surface, then rising. At this time one of the sailors, more venturesome than the rest, swam out into the channel, and the shark catching the scent, swung its tail from side to side and darted upward, baring its notched fin to the sunlight.

"Ahoy there!" came from the foretop. "Come aboard!"

The lookout did not utter the word shark, but the swimmer turned and struck out.

"Way third cutter!" rang out from the quartermaster.

The boat struck the water with a crash, naked men fell into her and seizing the oars gave way. Men never pulled like this before; yet the man in the bow, boat-hook in hand, urged them on in God's name. The swimmer was still twenty feet away when the shark shot ahead assuming a titanic shape. He turned slightly though not upon his back, and for a second the man in the bow saw its ghastly form



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against the blue, then in a moment of horror realized that he was too late.

The white shark with the notched fin was noticed at Aspinwall several months where desperate efforts were made to capture him, then he attached himself to a northbound steamer and followed her through the Strait of Florida, by Cuba, up the Bahama Banks, leaving her by a singular fatality where he was born, near Cary's Foot Light on the Florida coast. Here he was attracted by a fleet of wreckers. He lingered here a few weeks, then dogged a tramp steamer to Bermuda, and one day went to sea on the trail of a British cruiser. But she was only going out for gun practice, and as the huge sullen brute came boldly to the surface and circled about the vessel, glaring at her with his beadlike eyes, the big lateenlike dorsal cutting the water, one of the men asked permission to fire at him, and cleverly sent a ball through his gills.

Then came the culmination in the career of this insatiate monster, wounded to the death, but so insensible to injury that the scent of his own life blood reached his brain before the sense of pain, his first move being not alarm, but desire. Frenzied by the lust for blood, rapine and slaughter, the man-eater turned and dashed through the deep red cloud, and was rushing savagely from side to side *in search of himself*, when a second shot cut the soft spinal marrow. The great mass dropped inert. For the first time the powerful tail did not respond; the huge lips

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gripped tightly, the rows of gleaming teeth stood erect for a moment, then the small expressionless eyes convulsively turned inward, the pilot fishes darted wildly about the dropping head and open gills, the black and white remoras were along his tawny sides hard and fast; the man-eater was dead.

In one of the great British museums is the mounted and splendid specimen of a shark. The length is given as twenty-five feet, and the card attached to it states that it is an adult specimen of the white shark or man-eater, *Carcharodon*. It was donated by the officers of one of His Majesty's ships. It is a perfect specimen of this rare shark, if we except the wound or notch on the dorsal fin.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN OCEAN SWASHBUCKLER

**I**N the summer months about the islands of Southern California the angler may see a long, slender fish dash out of the blue water at an angle of forty-five degrees. Instead of turning gracefully, as does the tuna, it falls heavily, with a loud and resonant crash. Perhaps this is repeated several times, in which case the observer obtains a fair though fleeting view of the swordman of the sea, the living rapier, whose carte, tierce and lunge are more than effective among a host of its associates.

There are several species of these fishes found in Californian waters, from the common *Xiphias* to the spearfish, trim, warlike and menacing. Ordinarily their movements are slow; swimming along the surface, allowing a boat or yacht to approach them; but when roused by the presence of an enemy, or by that of prey, the fish becomes a veritable type of activity. Schools of young mackerel or barracuda are its special prey, and dashing into them with the speed of a cannon ball it slashes to the right and left, myriads of silvery pieces falling in a shower to tell the story of its prowess. These it does not always stop to

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pick up, but, seized with an insatiate lust for blood, continues charging the school again and again, until the water is filled with the dead and dying.

The number of swordfishes observed in this locality, and especially the appearance of a large school of adults in the San Clemente channel last season, aroused the question of their possible capture. One fisherman procured a New England swordfish outfit, and proposed going into the sport with the regulation "lily iron"; but before an opportunity offered, the report came from a boatman that one of his patrons had hooked a swordfish, and for a few moments had played it with a tuna rod and line—a statement which aroused no little interest among those anglers who are essentially seekers after the big game of the sea with rod and reel. This unheard-of occurrence, in American waters, at least, of hooking a swordfish took place near the great Sphinx Rock, which constitutes the end of Santa Catalina Island to the southwest. An angler was fishing for yellowtail—a fish which runs up to forty pounds or more, and was using a rod weighing about fourteen ounces with a 21-thread cuttyhunk line. He was trolling near shore, not one hundred feet from the edge of the kelp bed, when an unusual strike came; not the ordinary tug and downward rush of the yellowtail, but a fierce jerk, which sent the music of the reel humming through the air, followed by a marvelously quick rush almost around the boat. It

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was something totally new in the angler's experience, and he instinctively rose to his feet to see the game, when a sharp, long-pointed object became visible—the weapon of the swordfish. Apparently it was coming toward the boat, so the angler hesitated and was in favor of breaking the line, but the boatman, possibly seeing new laurels in the venture, urged him to play the fish, which now turned and bore away with a speed that made the reel sing and the line whistle and hiss through the water.

“You have him, sir!” whispered the boatman.

“He has me,” was the retort of the angler, who was pressing down on the thumb brake as hard as his conscience would permit; and this was the truth. Large tunas had been turned within six hundred feet with the same tackle; but the swordfish, so far as could be learned, was not swerved a foot from its course. It charged directly away from the boat at a marvelous speed, and in less time than it requires to think it, the line became exhausted, snapped, and the first swordfish hooked in these waters was away.

This was the simple episode which aroused interest in the possibilities of this sport. It is evidently a question of line, and it is the opinion of some anglers that with a full thousand feet the big fish might be rounded up; and if once turned, the man at the reel could control the situation. That there would be an element of danger in this fishing goes without saying, and is well illustrated by the experience of an

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acquaintance in the Indian Ocean. Being an expert angler, he always carried rods and reels with him on his travels. Upon reaching one of the islands of those waters he found the commonest fish to be the huge-finned creature known as the sailfish, from its enormous dorsal fin, which, richly colored and raised high above the surface, resembles the sail of some Venetian craft upon whose canvas is emblazoned the arms of the owner. He found that it was the custom to bait these fish by throwing out chum, in this way enticing them around the boat within reach of spear or harpoon; as the fish eagerly took the offerings, he assumed that they could be hooked and determined to try it.

Upon announcing to the native fishermen what he proposed doing, he was met with incredible tales regarding the ferocity of the sailfish. One man had had a brother killed. Another had his pirogue sunk by a monster fish, twenty feet in length, and still another related that an enraged fish had charged his vessel, plunging through the sail and nearly killing some of the crew. Incredible as it may seem, this but added fuel to the flame of the angler's ambition, and he lost no time in his preparation for the sport. He learned that the swordfishes frequented a bank several miles off shore, and, having secured a somewhat clumsy boat and four men to row, he accompanied several pirogues one day to the ground, where he baited his hook with a fish resembling the

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mullet, and had his boat rowed slowly along. He had a reel of English make, which held nearly twelve hundred feet of 24-thread braided line, and a heavy rod of about the class used for the tarpon, with which he had taken large sharks up to three or four hundred pounds.

It was not long before one of the men called his attention to an object in the water two or three hundred yards away; it appeared to be the sail of a miniature craft vividly colored, moving leisurely, but proved to be the dorsal fin of the famous sailfish. Presently others were seen, and at one time four or five were cruising about; their splendid fins glistening in the sun in tints of red, purple and black. At the angler's order the boat was directed across the course of the fish, and was so accurately calculated that the bait was dragged directly before the leading fish, which swerved slightly to one side, and with a quick movement seized it. The sportsman waited a moment, paying out ten or fifteen feet of line, reckoning on the hard jaw of the fish, and then hooked it. He was familiar with the leap high into the air of the silver king, but in response to his movement there rose from the sea a fluttering sail-like fin, scintillating with color, and the body of a slender fish with long dangling finlets, with a sword of such size that the men dropped their oars in terror. According to the angler, the fish appeared to be eighteen feet in length. Clearing the water, it fell back with a

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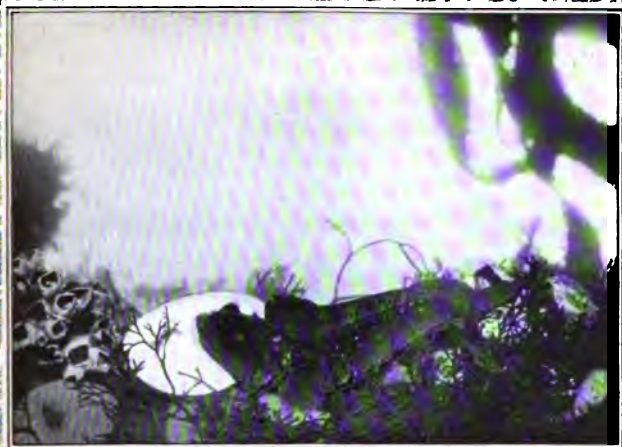
mighty crash, and the singing of the reel and the jerking motion of the rod told of the rush of the fish. It was irresistible, and the brake had to be used with great caution to prevent burning the line.

An element of the excitement was the disappearance of the other fishes, which the frightened boatmen said would attack the boat. They entreated him to cut the line; but he held the rod stiff and vainly attempted to stop the rush. Three hundred—five—eight hundred feet had gone, and it was evident that the end was coming, when suddenly the line slackened; the next moment three or four quivering fins were seen rushing along the surface.

“We are lost, master!” cried the terrified boatmen. “They see the boat.”

The fish were coming at a marvelous speed, their fins throwing the water high in air; but the angler reeled furiously, took in all the slack of the overrun he could and bade the men keep the stern of the boat to the fish, thus offering the least resistance. The men crowded into the bow, ready to leap overboard, vociferously hailing a neighboring pirogue, while the angler sat reeling as he had never reeled before, not knowing whether or not he was to be spitted. On came the fish, presenting a splendid spectacle of color, with their sails three feet out of water; but when within a short distance from the boat, they swerved and plunged down deep into the ocean. The men now seized the oars, and in obedience to orders, pulled





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(1) The Walking Fish. (2) Catalina Rock Bass.



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in the direction of the fish, hoping to gain; but the line came taut, and the reel again whistled and screamed.

“ Pull! row! ” cried the angler, straining to keep the rod in position, which the fish jerked downward.

The men bent to their oars. “ Pull; pull! ” reiterated the excited fisherman, as a terrific jerk landed the tip of his rod a foot under water. The natives pulled for their lives, forcing the clumsy craft through the water at a tremendous pace. The delighted angler soon saw that he was, at least, not losing line, and by careful manipulation he gained eight or ten feet. The boat was now under full headway, and as more strain could be put on the line, he gradually stopped the rowing, and finally had the fish towing the boat by the mere thread—the seeming enigma in tuna fishing. For half an hour the fish plunged along, occasionally swimming to one side, but always followed by the boat which one man was now steering. All the time the angler was gaining; very slowly, it is true, but foot by foot. The men were still afraid of the fish, and one and all insisted that when the school found out that the boat was the cause of the trouble, they would charge and endeavor to release their comrade; but it was the unexpected which happened. The fish was slowly reeled in, and when within sight of the boat, made a splendid rush beneath it, the men leaping to their feet in their fright. The angler, however, had the

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game in hand, and not wishing to take the chance of a gaff, told them to stand by with the harpoon. As he brought the great fish around again, a wonderful sight with its gaudy fins, enormous black eyes and menacing sword, the head boatman hurled the heavy spear into it. The sailfish fairly doubled up under the shock, deluging with water the fishermen, its sword coming out and striking the boat. A moment more and it might have escaped; but one of the men seized it by the sword, while another threw a rope around it, and the big game was theirs; in all probability, the first large swordfish ever taken with a rod and reel—at least, to the knowledge of the writer. Including the sword, the fish was sixteen feet in length, its splendid dorsal fin three and a half feet high. It was *Histiophorus gladius*, specimens of which have been seen in these waters ranging up to twenty-five feet in length, and weighing fifteen hundred pounds. Such a fish is a menace to ships, as well as to those who go down to sea in them.

That such sport would become popular if cultivated in Southern California waters is doubtful, as there is an element of danger in it to be considered—that of being rammed by the fish; and as many of the tuna boats now have from two to four horsepower engines, they would undoubtedly go to the bottom if injured by a revengeful swordfish. Despite this, several swordfishes were landed with rod and reel at Santa Catalina in 1906-7, and the fish has

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taken its place among the great leaping game fishes of the region. The record of the Tuna Club is 150 pounds, and a swordfish cup has been offered for the largest fish of the season.

That swordfishes are a menace to life has been demonstrated on many occasions. A fisherman on the coast of Maine was astonished to see the sword of a swordfish crash up through his dory. A similar attack occurred on the Long Island coast, the sword, according to Professor G. Brown Goode, barely missing the man, who, with great presence of mind, seized the sword, broke it off, and plugged the hole with his coat. The extraordinary force of these blows can hardly be realized or credited. Sir Joseph Banks cites an instance where the entire sword was driven through the hull of a ship; competent judges testified that it would require ten blows of a hammer weighing thirty pounds to produce a like result. The British ship *Dreadnaught* was injured so badly by a swordfish, that she was obliged to make port and go on the ways. The smack *Wyoming* from Gloucester, was similarly injured, and the crew had great difficulty in keeping her afloat. The smack *Morning Star*, of Mystic, had a remarkable experience with a large swordfish off Hatteras. She was struck so violently that she began to leak badly, and had to make Charleston. The sword had pierced the planking, timber and ceiling. The planking was two inches thick, the timber five, the ceiling was one and a half

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inches of white oak. Even more remarkable was the force expended upon the whaler *Fortune*, of Plymouth, by one of these fishes. The weapon had been driven through the copper sheathing, an inch board of under sheathing, a three-inch plank of hard wood, then through twelve inches of solid white oak timber, and then through two and a half inches of oak ceiling, finally penetrating an oil cask. Such a weapon can only be compared to a projectile, and doubtless many vessels or boats have been destroyed in this manner; sunk, as was the United States Fish Commission sloop *Red Hot*, by being pierced by this swordman of the sea.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TAKING OF BIG GAME FISHES

**T**H**ERE** is one stage in the playing of large game fishes when the surest angler, while putting on a bold front, feels himself giving way before a relentless foe, supposed to be a victim to his skill. As I recall the really large fishes which I have taken with rod and reel, harpoon, or cast-line, I am inclined to confess the truth that I was often the one actually caught, and that the game was but adding to the under-the-sea gayety of the nations by playing me.

The tarpon, tuna, black grouper, black sea bass, amber jack, Bahamian barracuda, and others are the big game of the sea, and when taken in a thoroughly sportsmanlike manner they afford the excitement of the tiger or lion hunt, and often much danger. Hunting big game, or catching big fish is strenuous sport, and not every sportsman is fond of it. I fancy a man must be born to it. Those who have a *penchant* for hard riding after the hounds, who feel inspired by a wild race across country, where the chances of neck-breaking are in one's favor, who feel actual enjoyment in the knowledge that a tiger may

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leap upon them at any moment, or that a rogue elephant is ready to charge, and those who find it interesting to play a fish that is likely to sink the boat or crash through it, all these belong to a class which typifies the ideal of sportsmanship, where the human animal divests himself of nearly all the advantages which nature has given him and enters the lists with the chances on the side of the lower animal. The nearer the sportsman comes to this, certainly the nearer he approaches the highest plane of sport, whose motto the world over is "fair play." It is a matter of congratulation that regard for the rights of the lower animals is increasing all over the country, and that attempts are being made to raise the standard of sport.

While hunting for big game as a sport is of extreme antiquity, honored by the precedents established by famous hunters of all time, the capture of great game fishes is a more or less modern pastime. Twenty or thirty years ago a tarpon or a tuna reel was unknown, and the sportsman who said that a two or three hundred-pound fish could be caught with what is technically known as a 18- or 21-thread line, would have been classed with Ananias, the patron saint of all piscatorial romancers. I recall being warned by a boatman at Santa Catalina, but a few years ago, that it would be dangerous to hook a tuna, as men had been jerked overboard by these fishes and drowned. I was told the same story by



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my boatman several years previous in the vicinity of Boon Island Light, on the Maine coast. My Indian boatman on the Florida reef considered me mad, I doubt not, when I remarked that I could take a big devil-fish or a sawfish with the grains from a small boat. I recollect when some journal came out with a letter in which the writer offered to defray the expenses of any angler who would go to Florida and successfully take a tarpon with rod and reel. The impossible came to pass; hundreds of tarpon are caught every season with a mere thread. The giant horse-mackerel, or tuna, has been conquered.\* An acquaintance fought a gigantic sail, or swordfish, in the Indian Ocean with rod and line until the fish leaped through the sail. The giant ray is taken, and has long been classed among game fish in the Carolinas.

The big game fishes of the world are comparatively few in numbers. Some of them are as follows: The tarpon, record rod catch, 223 pounds, by Dr. Howe, of Mexico, attains a weight of 300 pounds; black sea bass, California, 700 pounds, record catch by Mr. L. G. Murphy, 436 pounds; leaping tuna, 1,000 pounds, record catch by Col. C. P. Morehouse, 251 pounds; the jewfish of Florida or Texas, 800 pounds; the Bahamian barracuda, 100 pounds or more; black grouper, 600 pounds; the white sea bass,

\* The author took a 183-pound tuna with rod, reel and 21-thread line in four hours.

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California Gulf region, 100 pounds; yellow-fin tuna, and others not so well known. Then there are a number of fishes of large size to which the term game would not be applied by some, yet, were it not for prejudice, would be ranked among the hard fighters of the sea. Such is the remarkable leaping shark, caught among the tarpon at Aransas Pass, and which is so perfect a mimic of its acrobatic neighbor that I watched its leaps for some time, completely deceived. Several of the sharks, as the hammer-head, are lusty and game foes to the angler who desires the acme of strenuous sport. Sharks may be taken with either rod or handline, and what sport is to be had by a single man, matched against a large shark, from the beach or boat, depends upon the man. Many years ago, when residing in what might be called a shark country, I indulged in these contests frequently, and was more than once outmatched and outfought. I enjoyed the struggle, though often forced to surrender, breaking or cutting the line rather than be towed into dangerous waters by a foeman so large that I never even saw its outline against the blue waters.

Some of the rays are hard fighters, and the most exciting game for the harpoon, which I have described in a previous chapter, is the huge ray, *Manta*, an altogether uncanny and mysterious monster, with a habit of running off with small vessels. With these I would class the sawfish, a vigorous contestant, in

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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whose wake on the Florida reef I have found variety and action sufficient to satisfy the average craving for exciting sport. These fishes attain a length of fifteen or sixteen feet, and such a one, which weighed 600 pounds, was taken by Mr. Edwin Vom Hofe with a tarpon rod, reel, and No. 15 line, after a most vigorous contest. Such are some types of what may be termed the big game of the sea, all of which it has been my good fortune to take.

Almost every angler or grainsman has his peculiar method of fishing, and the following lines may be taken merely as illustrations of how one angler accomplished the killing: Nearly all anglers who follow big game at sea have an elaborate equipment, which can be housed in a small valise made for the purpose; such an outfit can be ordered from any of the large dealers, and would consist of a reel sufficiently large to hold 600 feet of a No. 21 line. What is known as a tarpon or tuna reel is now made, costing from twenty-five to seventy-five dollars, and is as perfectly constructed as a watch. This reel multiplies several times, and is provided with a patent internal drag to prevent overrunning, and is rigged with a leather thumb-piece strapped to the lower crossbar. In addition to this, some tarpon and tuna anglers strap a piece of rubber upon the rod above the reel, and with a thumb stall, provided by tackle dealers, press upon the line here. There are also several attachable brakes or drags. I have found the thumb and upper

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brake sufficient for ordinary work, though I have often wished for something else when my line was melting away before a Texas tarpon or a Santa Catalina tuna, which apparently nothing could stop.

It should be said with emphasis that a cheap reel for this fishing is impossible—a waste of time, patience, and money. An ultra complete outfit, ready for all emergencies, will contain two reels. There will be room in the bag for several lines. I believe a 21-thread is large enough to catch any fish that can be handled, and anglers like Mr. John C. Heckscher, Mr. Vom Hofe, Judge A. W. Houston, or Colonel Morehouse could easily demonstrate the possibility of taking the largest tarpon or tuna upon a No. 15 or 18 line; it is merely a question of time. If sharks are plentiful, and it is necessary to take the game in at once, a No. 21 line, or even a 24, is perhaps admissible. I have never used a line larger than the first mentioned, and have taken tunas and other large fishes with a 15-thread. The line must be of the best quality, and will cost from three and a half to four dollars for 600 feet. This line, in which lies the secret of taking big game, is a marvel of strength. It is of Irish linen, carefully made, and one which I have in mind, called No. 15, is tested to pull a dead weight of thirty pounds, while the No. 24 is tested to forty-eight pounds. Such lines cost four dollars for 600 feet, or about forty-five dollars per dozen. Before using, the line should be thoroughly

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stretched. The bag should contain a brass drier, upon which the line can be wound after using, and it is well to reverse it daily, if in constant use, and examine for broken strands, as by these tokens the angler shall discover why the biggest fish always escapes. When a large fish does obtain its liberty it is either from defective tackle or poor manipulation.

In the selection of hooks every angler has his fancy. The length and structure of the leader, snood, or snell is considered an important feature by anglers. It should be of tinned piano wire, six feet long, with at least three large swivels, and the fishing receptacle should contain a supply of tinned piano wire for this purpose; or, better, a large supply of ready-made hooks and leaders, a box of large swivels, a few sinkers, a cork float, a pair of cutting pincers, round and flat, a sheet of emery paper, a knife, small patent oiler for the reel, flat file, extra guides, spool of silk, a measuring tape, a little kit of tools packed in the handle, a drinking cup, some simple remedies for cuts and bruises, and the outfit is fairly complete. The angler should have two rods, or a rod with two tips—what is known as a tarpon or tuna rod—either noibwood, greenheart, split bamboo, ironwood, or lancewood. Personally I have used greenheart more than anything else, and I believe noibwood is a species of greenheart, highly commended. The rod for the very largest fishes should weigh about twenty-six ounces, and be six feet nine inches in length, and in

## *Big Game at Sea*

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two pieces, one long tip and a short butt. Such a rod, with a butt of hard rubber, tip of noibwood, silver mounted, with double silver and agate line guides, etc., will cost about twenty-two dollars. It is enclosed in a soft cloth case, and with other rods, perhaps packed in a leather trunk case, a luxury and convenience. It is also a good plan, if going to Florida, Aransas Pass, or Catalina, to box rods and check them. It is one of the pleasures of angling to possess a box or kit as described, more or less complete; yet it is not always necessary. If the angler is going to Santa Catalina he will find each boatman equipped with the best of rods, reels, and lines; if the angler breaks a fine rod or expensive line, he is expected to pay for it. At Aransas Pass, at the Tarpon Inn, the headquarters of the Aransas Pass Tarpon Club, of which Mr. L. P. Streeter is president, rods, reels—in fact, the entire equipment—can be purchased or rented. In Florida, if the angler is going to the tarpon grounds down the coast, or to Tampico in winter, he should invariably take his own tackle and not depend on finding it, though I am informed that good tackle can now be had here. If the angler desires to enter the lists with the Aransas Pass Tarpon Club, the Light Tackle, or Tuna Club of Santa Catalina, organizations which set the standards of sport in America, he should use the tackle advocated by these clubs, which is a six-ounce tip and a No. 9 line for all but the very largest of fishes.

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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With such an equipment, varying according to tastes, the angler is ready for action, and to find big game fish goes to one of the three more or less well-defined regions. Florida, beginning with Indian River, including Key West and the outer reef up to Cedar Keys, may be considered one. Here the sawfish, giant ray, jewfish, barracuda, and black grouper are found. The season begins, except for tarpon, in December, and March generally marks the arrival of the first tarpon. At Indian River the later the arrival the better the fishing, and as far south as the keys between Cape Florida and Key West, the angler will find sport earlier and at all times. Of course the summer season is the best for sport. I tried it for several years, but the intense heat and the mosquitoes more than off-set the additional catches. If midsummer tarpon fishing in comfort is desired, I would advise Aransas Pass. Here, at the little town of Tarpon, or at the Aransas Pass Tarpon Club, attractive conditions are found in midsummer—an omnipresent breeze, day and night, no malaria and few if any mosquitoes; conditions hard to be believed, but true. Here are the jewfish, the jack of a size to test the strength of the angler, king fish, hammer-head, the leaping shark, and tarpon, in such numbers that it is a rare occurrence for an angler on any day to draw a blank. Aransas Pass is reached by boat or cars from New York—by the former to Galveston, and by the latter to San Antonio; from here the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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Aransas Pass railroad is taken to Rockport. A daily mail boat now runs from here fifteen miles down and seven out to Tarpon. A third locality for big game fish is the Southern California islands, reached *via* Los Angeles.

We may assume that the game is tarpon and the objective is Captiva, or some pass on the west coast of Florida. The boat, an ordinary yawl, has a chair seat rigged astern, on the outer edge of which, between the angler's legs, is a leather socket fastened to the seat to receive the butt of the rod—a solace for many a weary angler. A small mullet, or a slice of mullet, is used for bait, and the boatman rows or anchors according to the conditions.

Many anglers use a leather or wired line snood or leader, so that sharks, which are often annoying, can readily take the hook and not weary the fisherman.

All being ready, the angler sees that his reel is lashed to the rod, overreels, pays out forty or fifty feet of line, and wets his leather drag-brake, so that the first rush will not burn off the line. This is not so important as in tuna fishing. Not a tuna was taken, though scores were hooked, until some one thought of it; prior to this it was supposed that the lines were defective, but the trouble was that the intense friction burned the slender line, or a thread, and the line broke. Whenever the complaint is made of very frequent breaks in standard lines, anglers will



## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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do well to see that their fish do not make long rushes with a dry line.

The angler makes himself comfortable, and keeps his rod always raised slightly, at an angle over the quarter, never pointing directly astern. The right hand grasps the butt, the thumb resting lightly upon the pad, while the left hand grips the cork grip above the reel. A strike comes; perhaps it is a nibble, perhaps a long, firm strain, as the tarpon is bound by no fixed laws or precedent. At this point some successful anglers strike at once; others give line, having in mind the extraordinary mouth of the tarpon. Unless the strike is very heavy, followed by an instantaneous rush, I give the fish some line, overreeling two or three feet, on the supposition that the fish requires a few seconds to properly seize the bait; but manifestly the angler must adapt himself to circumstances. Assuming that we have given several feet of line, it immediately comes taut. You quickly bend the tip of the rod a foot, perhaps two or three, toward the fish, and then sway back with an energetic movement—not a jerk—at the same time pressing hard upon the brake with the thumb; this is called giving the fish the butt—a process adopted at many stages in the play to stop a fish, or force it to change its direction, or to leap. Usually such a movement hooks the tarpon, and is almost invariably followed by the convulsive leap of the splendid fish into the air, where it appears to hang for a moment—

## *Big Game at Sea*

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a truly astonishing sight that has bewildered more than one angler and filled him with all the symptoms of buck fever. The fish has jumped in wild fear, like a bucking mustang, and when in mid-air endeavors, by a convulsive side movement and opening of the mouth, to fling out the hook—a trick often successful. At this stage of the game, the angler, if he has himself well in hand, will drop his rod point, keeping the line fairly taut and out of the water, but not at such a tension that a violent swing of the massive head can take it unawares and break it.

Into the water, perhaps upon its back, the monster drops, and the thumb is now pressed upon the leather brake while the fish makes its first rush—usually the most vehement and terrific—tearing off one hundred and fifty or more feet of line with incredible speed. Here many fishes are lost, especially tunas; the angler presses too hard upon the brake, and the line breaks. The pressure should be governed and tempered by intuition, and in this regulating the brake, while the fish is making a terrific rush and the reel is screaming, lies much of the skill. It depends upon the angler how soon the rush will stop; but the moment the least sign of slowing up comes the thumb should be pressed vigorously, the fish stopped. Now the right hand springs for the first time to the handle of the reel, the butt is placed in the leather socket, and the subsequent operations depend upon circumstances. The fish has

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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been stopped—that is, is not taking any line from the reel, but it is forging around in a semi-circle, or is moving steadily ahead, towing the boat. If it is a shark country, there is no time to waste in observing the play of the fish or taking time; on the contrary, if sharks are not plentiful, the angler may proceed with a certain amount of deliberation; but it is an axiom with nearly all anglers that if the fish is large it must be fought constantly, and not allowed to obtain its “second wind”; if this is not done a large fish will continue the contest interminably. A tuna has been known to tow a boat fourteen hours and wear out two men, ultimately escaping. I played such a tuna four hours and was towed nearly ten miles, despite the fact that I fought the fish constantly; but I was nearly outclassed. The fish weighed 183 pounds. A hammer-head shark which I played two hours required five boats to tow it to the shore.

We have stopped the fish; the right hand is now on the reel handle, and dropping the tip of the rod, the reel is turned, rapidly eating up the line; then, when the tip reaches the water, the thumb slips back to the brake and the angler slowly lifts the fish. Then the tip is rapidly dropped, and the right hand slides over the handle again, which is whirled around, gaining at least six or seven feet, or the length of line equivalent to a fourth the arc of a circle, or from the perpendicular top of the rod to the surface of the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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water. This is known as "pumping," from the up-and-down motion of the rod, and is difficult to accomplish at first, as the fish is liable to rush at any moment, and the novice fails to shift from brake to reel handle, or *vice versa*, quickly enough; but after some practice the motion is readily acquired, and the fish brought in with astonishing celerity; in fact, to hold the rod stiff and attempt to reel in a fish out of hand by merely turning the crank—as one would a trout or bass, as the uninitiated angler invariably does—is almost a physical impossibility, especially in the case of a large fish; and I have seen a fisherman, ignorant of the art of pumping, work for an hour, perhaps, over a twenty-pound yellowtail. The man held the rod stiff and turned the reel, when the fish made a rush, the flying handle playing havoc with his fingers. By pumping, a large fish can be brought in with rapidity and ease; but sooner or later the fish leaps again, when the hand must be on the brake ready for the rush, which may be repeated time and again with infinite variations. The tarpon, or any large fish, should be kept as near the boat as possible, and much depends upon the boatman. At the first cry of the reel—the tell-tale, which keeps the boatman posted—he stops rowing, and when the fish is hooked, backs water, thus enabling the angler to gain on the fish, and, all through the vicissitudes of the fisherman and the various phases of the contest, it is his duty to keep the fish on the starboard quarter,



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(1) The Puff Shark of California and Its Eggs. (2) The Rose of Paradise Fish. These Photographs Were Taken from Life Under Water at the Avalon Zoological Station.



## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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though some anglers prefer it directly astern, or as near that location as possible.

Leaping and rushing, the tarpon, under these manipulations, comes slowly in, and is finally pumped alongside. It is well to be ready now for an especially vicious rush; but it is generally a short one, and the angler ultimately succeeds in reeling the fish up until the end of the five-foot leader is near the tip. The tip of the rod is now slowly and steadily passed forward, the thumb being on the leather brake, and the boatman, gaff in hand, watches his opportunity. A poor gaffer, or an excitable one, will ruin the sport; but assuming that the man understands his duty, he will wait until the fish is amidships, or the angler gives the word, when he will slip the gaff—a long pole with a sharp, powerful, steel hook at the end—beneath the fish, and, with an upward jerk, impale it in the throat or nearer the mouth if possible. Boatmen are usually provided with a clumsy barbed gaff of indifferent point, with which they have difficulty in gaffing. The gaff should be slender, but strong; the point long and extremely sharp, so that a moderate jerk will impale any fish, and it should be fastened to the boat by a rope twenty or thirty feet in length. I have frequently had the gaff jerked from my hands by a large black sea bass; to have held on would have been to join the fish in its native element.

As the boatman gaffs, the angler overruns his line

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with the right hand, raises the tip of his rod, and, with thumb on the brake, awaits developments. The well-drilled gaffer will not attempt to gaff until the fish is exactly where it should be. The man who becomes rattled, hooks at the fish wildly, or strikes at it with the gaff overhand, or gaffs it in any other way than described, is the man for the angler to avoid, as he will either cut the line or in some way jeopardize success. The best of gaffers may miss the fish, especially in a seaway, and the angler must always be ready for a fierce rush; the line must be clear; the boatman or gaffer must, as a rule, not touch it (in the Tuna Club tournaments this would disqualify an angler for a record); and if the rush does come the angler checks it as soon as possible and pumps the fish to gaff again. Assuming that the gaffer has secured it, he lifts its head as high as possible and holds it while it goes through the inevitable flurry, which has on various occasions drenched me. Then when opportunity offers he steps upon the gunwale, if the boat is of proper beam. The fish's head is slowly raised and the boat tipped to the extent of safety, when the big fish slides easily into the boat to again assert itself. Every boatman should carry a canvas sail or semi-bag six or eight feet square, which can be hauled over the struggling fish, aiding materially in quieting it. Many anglers shoot tarpon at the gaff, or in other fish endeavor to disable them by throat-cutting, but one is governed by circumstances.



## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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Assuming that the fish has been successfully taken aboard, felicitations are timely. If the boatman has done well, he should be complimented, and the angler will not be proof against the statement of the latter that, "he'll be dogged if he ever saw a tarpon so well handled before"; and as "Mat," "Billy," or "Jim" wipes his lips, he really believes it.

Such, with variations, may be said, at least in my experience, to be a typical catch, although it is the unexpected which always happens in fishing, and the resources of the angler are frequently exhausted. Thus a well-known tarpon fisherman had a fish leap into the air, and, as it came down, crash through the bottom of the boat. At present few anglers gaff their fish; they are unhooked at the boat, or towed ashore. In the former instance the angler plays the fish until it is fairly "tamed"; then the gaffer grasps the line, which is doubled or trebled for a foot or more above the leader for this purpose, and holds the fish while he inserts a short, unbarbed gaff under the lower jaw; by this a clever man can hold the fish firmly and detach the hook, releasing the fish after taking an estimate of its length or weight. If the fish is large, or the sea is too high, the fish is beached—a most laborious operation, if the beach is some distance away, as the angler must hold the fish, keep it headed to the boat, having the line reeled so far in that the first swivel is against the agate tip. The reel is held by the thumb brake and left-hand thumb

## *Big Game at Sea*

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stall, and the oarsman rows as rapidly as possible to the beach. If the fish is large it may break away several times during this operation, to be pumped in again; and as it approaches the shallow water it will invariably make a last effort. Reaching the beach, the boatman leaps over, takes the line by the trebled portion, and drags it in, the angler slacking out as it goes by, overrunning his reel, always ready for a rush, as, if the boatman is forced to drop the fish, he must be ready to take it without giving the fish any slack line, which often would be fatal. Assuming that the fish has been beached, it is measured, length and girth and weight determined by the old fishing formula—the square of the girth in inches multiplied by the length in inches, divided by 800 will give the approximate weight.

In tuna fishing almost the same tackle is used; a 21-thread line is amply large. The smaller the line the greater the test of skill. The tuna boats at Santa Catalina are the most perfectly equipped fishing boats to be found anywhere, being built and designed for the purpose, and are eighteen or twenty-foot launches, rigged for two anglers. The fishing is in blue water, six or eight hundred feet in depth. The fish swim in pairs, as a rule, or in a school, and when the strike comes it is a swift surge; the fish comes for the boat along the surface at full speed, and does not stop; hence the angler is not required to set the hook, the fish almost invariably hooking itself. Sharks are

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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rarely a factor here, hence the angler can take his time. Some have the boatman pull against the fish; others, who would make a short fight, have the boat backed after the game, reeling when they can. An instantaneous plunge, or rush down, may be expected—in some fishes so irresistible that the entire line is unreeled; and here most of the tunas are lost. By legitimate thumb pressure an average fish should be stopped before it takes two hundred feet of line, and then the angler will find that it is nearly three hundred feet directly down, yet towing the launch slowly but surely out to sea. Pumping—but now vertical—is resorted to, and repeated rushes may be expected; some away, some at the boat, when the line must be reeled in with all the rapidity possible, and the hand transferred quickly to the brake as the fish turns and charges. With a light rod I have brought a ninety-five pound fish to gaff in forty minutes. Many anglers, with short, stiff rods, bring their fish to gaff in from ten to thirty minutes; but particularly game fishes often fight for hours, dying suddenly of heart failure. Tunas are always gaffed, and in the manner described in tarpon fishing; the difference between the fishes is that the tuna jumps only when feeding. Its rushes are more vigorous—down instead of out; being caught in deep water, its fighting powers are at least twenty-five per cent. greater than those of the tarpon.

The tuna and tarpon are types of fishes which bite

## *Big Game at Sea*

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or strike on or near the surface, though the tarpon is often taken on the bottom. In the black sea bass of California and the black grouper of Florida, both of which attain a weight of three or four hundred pounds, we have examples of bottom fishes, though I have taken them both in thirty feet, or less, of water. The same tackle as described is used here, a short rod being advisable, owing to the fact that a three-hundred-and-fifty-pound fish is a terrific weight in itself to lift. The black sea bass is a nibbler, and will often "fool around" the bait, which is five or six pounds, or more, of albacore meat, or a seven-pound live white-fish. When the strike comes the line is allowed to run over eight or ten feet; then, as it comes taut, the hook is driven in with a strong, swaying back rather than a jerk. The response is immediate, and, with a hand or cast line, I have almost been jerked overboard by a three-hundred-and-forty-seven-pound fish. The rush is shorter than with the previously described fishes, and the black grouper, especially, is a wild and often untamable steed, towing the boat hither and yon, while a black sea bass has been known to resist an angler for three hours and tow him far out to sea.

The great barracuda, which attains a length of six or seven feet, affords features and incidents which may be said to be between the extremes described. I have taken it on the surface and in mid-water, and found it a splendid game fish. The same tackle can

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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be used as in the case of other large fishes, but it should be lighter.

The preceding methods are those adopted and used by the Tuna Club of Santa Catalina, founded ten years ago by the author for the protection of the oceanic game fishes of California. The 21-strand line was advocated to lessen the catch, and foil the "fish hog" and his tribe, but many anglers use a 9, 18, and other small lines.

It is believed that the 21-thread line is the logical size for the largest fishes mentioned, but the Light Tackle Club, founded by its President, Mr. Arthur J. Eddy, of Chicago, which has its headquarters at Avalon, Cal., advocates a rod which weighs but sixteen ounces and a 9-thread line for fishes under one hundred pounds. The action of these two clubs places sea angling on a very high standard. They offer valuable prizes for the record fishes taken according to their rules, and the yearly tournaments are of much interest. Those who take a twenty-pound fish with the tackle of the Light Tackle Club are entitled to a bronze button; a forty-five-pound fish brings among the joys of the catch a silver button, while a sixty-pound fish caught with this thread entitles the angler to a gold button. And twelve anglers have qualified, taking the yellow-finned tuna up to sixty pounds and over. The prizes of this club for the season of 1906 were as follows:

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### CUPS

For the largest gold button fish of the season, silver loving cup; won by Mr. Arthur J. Eddy, of Pasadena, Cal.; kind of fish, tuna; net weight, sixty pounds.

For the largest albacore of the season, silver loving cup, presented by W. H. Hoegge Company, Los Angeles; won by Mr. Gustave J. Frickman, New York; net weight of fish, thirty-eight pounds, eleven ounces.

### PRIZES

For the largest tuna of the season, first prize, silver mounted rod; won by Mr. Arthur J. Eddy, Pasadena, Cal.; net weight of fish, sixty pounds.

Second prize, reel; won by Mr. T. McD. Potter, Los Angeles; net weight of fish, fifty-five pounds, two ounces.

For the largest yellowtail of the season, first prize, rod, presented by W. M. Hunt, Jr., Avalon; won by Mr. A. A. Carraher, Avalon; net weight of fish, thirty-eight and one-half pounds.

Second prize, reel, presented by the Tufts-Lyon Arms Company, Los Angeles; won by Mr. T. McD. Potter, Los Angeles; net weight of fish, thirty-eight pounds.

For the largest albacore of the season, first prize, rod, presented by the Pasadena Hardware Com-

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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pany, Pasadena, Cal.; won by Mr. Gustave J. Frickman, New York; net weight of fish, thirty-eight pounds, eleven ounces.

Second prize, Pflueger reel, presented by the Enterprize Manufacturing Company, Akron, Ohio; won by Mrs. H. H. Cotton, Los Angeles; net weight of fish, thirty-seven and one-half pounds.

For the largest white sea bass of the season, first prize, rod, presented by Tufts-Lyon Arms Company, Los Angeles; won by Mr. Arthur J. Eddy, Pasadena; net weight of fish, thirty-four pounds.

Second prize, rod, presented by Harper-Reynolds Company, Los Angeles; won by E. H. Brewster, Avalon; net weight of fish, thirty-two pounds.

For the largest bonita of the season, prize, 900-foot 9-thread linen line, presented by Mrs. C. H. White, Colorado Springs, Colo.; won by E. H. Brewster, Avalon.

For the largest skipjack of the season, prize, 900-foot 9-thread linen line, presented by Mr. E. H. Brewster, of Avalon; won by Mrs. Stella W. McNeil, Colorado Springs, Colo.

To elevate the standard of sport, the Tuna Club gives a tournament every year. The following are the prizes of the year 1907, and a typical announcement of the tournament:

## *Big Game at Sea*

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*"The Protection of the Game Fishes of California and  
the Establishment of a Higher Standard of Sport."*

President, CHARLES F. HOLDER, Pasadena, Cal.	First Vice-President, THOS. S. MANNING, Avalon, Cal.
Second Vice-President, COL. C. P. MOREHOUS, Pasadena, Cal.	Third Vice-President, W. H. BURNHAM, Orange, Cal.
Secretary, L. P. STREETER, Pasadena, Cal.	Corresponding Secretary, F. L. HARDING, Philadelphia, Pa.
ALFRED L. BEEBE, Portland, Ore.	T. McD. POTTER, Los Angeles, Cal.

### THE NINTH ANNUAL SUMMER SEA ANGLING TOURNAMENT

OF THE  
SANTA CATALINA ISLAND TUNA CLUB  
May 1 to October 1, 1907, Inclusive

The Santa Catalina Island Tuna Club in the interests of a higher standard of sport, the protection of game fishes, and the higher development of the art of sea angling (rod and reel) on the Pacific coast, announces its Ninth Annual Sea Angling Tournament to be held under the rules of the Club at Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, California, from May 1st to October 1st, 1907.

The game fishes referred to in this tournament are divided into two classes.

#### CLASS A

Leaping Tuna, Black Sea Bass, and Swordfish of any kind. Rod and reel, rod to measure not less than 6 feet, 9 inches in length, tip to weigh not more than 16 ounces. By tip is meant that part of the rod from the reel seat to the tip. The line must



## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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not exceed standard 24 strands. (If the angler desires to use a standard 9-thread line for these large fishes, he may use not less than a 5-foot tip, weighing not more than 6 ounces, the butt not longer than 14 inches.)

### CLASS B

In this are included all other fishes, Albacore, Yellow-fin Tuna, White Sea Bass, Yellowtail, etc. Contestants in this class must use rod and reel. The tips must not be less than 5 feet in length and must not weigh more than 6 ounces; butt must not be longer than 14 inches. The line in this class must be a standard 9-thread linen line.

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### RULES

Anglers must bring fish to gaff entirely unaided. The fish must be reeled in fairly; a broken rod either before or after gaffing disqualifies the angler, it being assumed to display a lack of skill. The tournament is open to amateurs only, professional fishermen or those engaged in allied industries and members of their families are barred.

### PRESENT HOLDERS OF CUPS AND RECORDS ARE:

#### LARGEST LEAPING TUNA—(*Thunnus thynnus*)

C. F. Holder, Pasadena, Cal., season 1899	. . . . .	183 pounds
Col. C. P. Morehous, Pasadena, Cal., season 1900	. . . . .	251 pounds
Mrs. E. N. Dickerson . . . . .	. . . . .	216 pounds
F. S. Schenck, Brooklyn, N. Y., season 1901	. . . . .	158 pounds
F. V. Rider, Avalon, Cal., season 1901 . . . . .	. . . . .	158 pounds
Ernest E. Ford, season 1902 . . . . .	. . . . .	174 pounds
John F. Stearns, Los Angeles, Cal., year 1902	. . . . .	197 pounds
H. E. Smith, season 1903 . . . . .	. . . . .	94 pounds
General A. W. Barrett, Los Angeles, Cal., season 1904	. . . . .	131 pounds

## *Big Game at Sea*

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### RECORD BLACK SEA BASS—(*Stereolepis*)

F. V. Rider, Avalon, season 1898 . . . . .	327 pounds
T. S. Manning, Avalon, season 1899 . . . . .	372 pounds
F. S. Schenck, Brooklyn, N. Y., season 1900 . . . . .	384 pounds
A. C. Thompson, Pomona, Cal., season 1901 . . . . .	384 pounds
H. T. Kendall, Pasadena, Cal., season 1902 . . . . .	419 pounds
Edward Llewellyn, Los Angeles, Cal., 1903 . . . . .	425 pounds
H. L. Smith, New York, season 1904 . . . . .	402 pounds
L. G. Murphy, Converse, Ind., season 1905 . . . . .	436 pounds

### LARGEST YELLOWTAIL—(*Seriola*)

F. V. Rider, Avalon, Cal., season 1898 . . . . .	41 pounds
F. S. Gerrish, Jacksonville, Fla., season, 1899 . . . . .	37 pounds
R. F. Stocking, Los Angeles, Cal., season 1900 . . . . .	48 pounds
T. S. Manning, Avalon, Cal., season 1901 . . . . .	33 pounds
Dr. Trowbridge, Fresno, Cal., season 1902 . . . . .	47½ pounds
F. P. Newport, season 1903 . . . . .	46 pounds
H. Meyst, Chicago, Ill., season 1904 . . . . .	44 pounds
J. E. Pflueger, Akron, O., 1905 . . . . .	43 pounds
A. A. Carraher, 1906 . . . . .	38½ pounds

### LARGEST WHITE SEA BASS—(*Cynoscion*)

C. H. Harding, Philadelphia, Pa., season, 1904 . . . . .	60 pounds
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### LARGEST SWORDFISH—(*Tetrapturus*)

Edward Llewellyn, Los Angeles, Cal. . . . .	150 pounds
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### PRIZES

No. 1

#### TUNA CLUB SILVER LOVING CUP

(Donated by the Banning Co.)

For the largest Leaping Tuna of the season over 100 pounds.  
This cup remains the property of the Club, the name of the

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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winner being engraved upon it. It is the most interesting and hardly contested cup of any sea angling club in the world.\*

### No. 2

#### THE MONTGOMERY SILVER CUP

(Presented by Montgomery Bros., Los Angeles)

This trophy becomes the property of the angler who shall hold the Tuna record (100 pounds or over) three successive years.

### No. 3

#### THE TUNA CLUB GOLD MEDAL

This hardly contested for medal tells a remarkable story of almost incredible contests with the greatest game fish known in the annals of sea angling. It bears the name of winning anglers and remains the property of the Club, the name of the successful angler being added every year. No event in the entire range of sea angling lends more honor to the sea angler than to have his name inscribed on the bars of this medal, which goes to the angler taking the largest leaping tuna of the season over 100 pounds.

### No. 4

#### TUNA CLUB GOLD BUTTON

The angler taking the largest Tuna of the season becomes eligible to, and receives the gold button of, the Tuna Club, an insignia (showing a gold Tuna on a blue background with name of the club) known all over the world as an evidence of remarkable contests with the king of large game fishes taken with the tackle specified by the Club.

### No. 5

#### EDWARD VOM HOFE PRIZE

For exceeding the Club record, Rod and Reel, donated by Edward Vom Hofe, of New York City. (Tuna.)

\*The Leaping Tuna referred to in this tournament is the fish known to naturalists as *Thunnus thynnus*, the largest of all the bony fishes.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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No. 6

### THE MOREHOUS TUNA CUP

Col. Morehous, ex-president of the Tuna Club, offers a silver cup to the angler who will exceed his record under the Tuna Club rules.

No. 7

### HOLDER SWORDFISH CUP

Charles Frederick Holder, of Pasadena, Cal., founder of the Tuna Club, offers a silver cup to be known as the "Swordfish Cup," to be contested for under the rules. The angler taking the heaviest fish of the season shall have his name engraved on the cup. By securing this record for two successive years, he becomes the owner of the cup.

No. 8

### BLACK SEA BASS

### TUFTS-LYON CUP

For exceeding the Club record.

No. 9

### RIDER-MACOMBER GOLD MEDAL

The medal goes to the angler taking the largest fish of the season.

No. 10

### JOHN F. FRANCIS GOLD MEDAL

For the largest Yellowtail of the season, John F. Francis gold medal; winner's name to be engraved on gold bar each season, medal to be property of the Club.

No. 11

### HARDING CUP

Mr. F. L. Harding, of Philadelphia, Pa., awards a cup for the largest Bonito of the season, to be won three times.

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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No. 12

### THE EDDY LIGHT TACKLE CUP

Arthur Jerome Eddy, President of the Light Tackle Club of Avalon, offers a cup for the largest Yellowtail of the season. Light Tackle club rules, 16-oz. rod, 9-thread line, etc.

No. 13

### THE NORDLINGER LADIES' CUP

(Presented by S. Nordlinger & Sons)

The lady taking the largest Yellowtail of the season will have her name engraved on the cup.

No. 14

### THE C. H. HARDING TUNA CLUB WHITE SEA BASS GOLD MEDAL

The angler taking the largest fish of the season, over 60 pounds weight (9-thread line, etc.), shall have his name engraved on the bar.

No. 15

### THE L. P. STREETER ALBACORE SILVER MEDAL (*Tbunnus Alalonga*)

The angler taking the largest albacore of the season, over 40 pounds (9-thread line, etc.), shall have his name engraved on the bar.

No. 16

### YELLOW-FIN TUNA CUP (Yellow fin—*Tbunnus maculatus*)

The angler taking the largest fish of the season (9-thread line, etc.) shall have his name engraved on the cup.

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No. 17

THE COL. D. M. BURNS CUP

(Value \$400)

Goes to the angler exceeding the Tuna Club record of Leaping Tunas—251 pounds.

No. 18

THE T. McD. POTTER CUP

(Value \$400)

To the angler taking the largest red button fish.

### RULES

All catches must be reported at once to a member of the weighing committee, weighed in his presence and posted. Tackle must be exhibited with the fish, no allowance for shrinkage. Anglers shall fish with but one rod at a time and take fish absolutely unaided. The club recommends a 21-thread line for Leaping Tuna, Black Sea Bass and Swordfish, and No. 9 for all other fish.

#### RESIDENT WEIGHING COMMITTEE

T. S. Manning, Chairman; E. L. Doran, W. H. Burnham, L. P. Streeter, L. H. Brewster.

It is extraordinary what influence the co-operation of gentlemen has in accomplishing angling reforms. Previous to the formation of the Tuna Club, fishes were caught at Santa Catalina wholly with hand-lines. To-day, rods are used entirely. There is not a boatman at Avalon out of the large number, who would allow its use in his boat. Every fish has a fair chance for its life, fair play, a square deal, a line

## *The Taking of Big Game Fishes*

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being used so small and delicate that the slightest mistake breaks it; indeed, I am told that when an albacore weighing sixty pounds takes 600 or 800 feet of a No. 9 line, the latter often breaks itself under the severe strain. The action of these clubs could be imitated all over the country to advantage, and the man who entertains the belief that the best angler is he who catches the most fish, should be put to the blush and drummed out of the fishing grounds of America.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A TIGER OF THE SEA

**T**HE angler held a polished vibrant noibwood rod with a grip of iron, but the line dangled listlessly in the wind. It had come whizzing at him with the coils of a snake a second before, and his face had perceptibly whitened beneath the coat of tan that one takes on along the Kuroshiwo in California.

“Did you see it, Jack?” he asked the boatman and gaffer who had jerked the lever of the little launch and was sending her inshore at the top of her speed.

“Did I, sir? I think I did. You’re the first gentleman ever played a killer.”

“I don’t know about playing,” replied the angler; “I only hooked him and he went into the air.”

“Yes, sir,” answered the gaffer; “but he was hooked all right, and it was the old one that ran under the line. Did you see that fin, sir? Five foot, if an inch, and the light lavender half circle on its back?”

“Suppose I had caught it, and I think I could have played it; it was not over six feet in length, not longer than a big tuna.”



## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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"Why, the dam would have bitten the launch in two; she could do it, sir. She was thirty feet long and had teeth like spikes."

The angler laughed.

The boatmen around the channel islands of Southern California have a pronounced respect for the "killer"—the small, toothed whale that frequents these waters the year round. The angler had been trolling with a small sardine for the amber fish, and a school of killers or orcas had quietly come up, the infant of the school had seized the bait, been hooked and sprang into the air, showing its entire length. As the tall knife-like dorsal fins of the old whales pierced the water everywhere, showing that they were excited, the boatman stood not on the order of going, but immediately put in toward shore. Not that he was a coward, far from it; he knew the possible danger when a young whale has been attacked and the adult animal can find the cause. The adult gray whale has been known to follow a boat so far inshore that she beached herself in frantic endeavors to reach the human despoiler and many a lonely grave in the sands of Lower California might have as its epitaph, "Killed by a revengeful whale."

Few animals known to man possess the savage and murderous nature of the small whale-like animals known as killers or orcas. They pass under various names as black fish, killer, orca, kill fish, sea tiger, and deserve all the titles. The shark may be a man-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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eater; is a sodden blood-lustful brute, a scavenger of the seas, a midnight prowler seeking devious paths to accomplish its ends; but the killer charges the largest of all animals, the whale, and the story of its life is one of relentless carnage.

“ Whole kingdoms fell  
To sate the lust of power; more horrid still  
The foulest stain and scandal of our nature,  
Became its boast, ‘ One murderer made a villain,  
Millions, a hero.’ ”

Lines which might well apply to the orca in its raids upon the animal life.

For a number of years I have watched the movements of a school of orcas in the Santa Catalina Channel, one of which was hooked by an angler in the manner described. They are present the entire year presumably, but are more common in the summer months, sailing up and down, having a rendezvous off what is known as the tuna fishing grounds, a range of five or six miles in extent, from Long Point on the island of Santa Catalina to the sea lion rookery on the south end. The reason for this is obvious, as the savory tuna is a tid-bit, a *bonne bouche* for the orca, and doubtless the greatest of all fishes often falls a victim to its rapacity. Then, too, the sulphur-bottom whale frequents the Santa Catalina Channel, several often being seen, as well as the gray whale, each of which is at times a victim to the fury



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- (1) A Catalina Sculpin.  
(2) Home of the Sea Urchin.



## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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and rapacity of these smaller but toothed cannibal whales.

Such an attack was witnessed several years ago off the Bay of Avalon. The channel was as smooth as a disk of steel and of that blue that seems a reflection of the sky. Suddenly not far from the rocky cliffs of the islands a large whalebone whale shot into the air, flung itself out of the water, returning with a mighty crash, so near a boat that the occupant saw the details of what was apparently a tragedy. As the monster rose, clinging to its head were seen several black and white creatures, which appeared to be fastened to it, and the leap of the whale was to shake them off. The whale evidently sounded and came out of the water a moment later like a catapult, swinging its tail about and around with relentless fury, striking blows that would have wrecked a large vessel at contact.

The whale, which was sixty or more feet in length, was attacked by these hounds of the sea, the orca or killer; they had seized it by its huge lips and were clinging with all the ferocity of a pack of bulldogs. In vain did the giant swing its deadly tail. The nimble foes leaped over it, avoiding it with ease, directing their attacks at its most vulnerable point—the throat, lips, and tongue.

Impelled by the fascination of this duel of sea monsters, the observers drew nearer and watched what was in all probability one of the most remarkable

## *Big Game at Sea*

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sea fights ever witnessed by man at so close a range. They were so near that the blood of the whale changed the water about them from turquoise blue to incarnadine; and the waves created by the leaping and rushing of the ponderous body made their boat rise and fall, as though on a heavy sea. The orcas tore the wide lid-like lips of the whale, biting great pieces from the tongue, and, crazed with the lust for blood, rent the huge creature until it seemed completely cowed, lying on the surface, making ineffective swings from right to left, rising, then sounding in a fury of indecision and fright.

For nearly half an hour this combat continued, then the whale, apparently exhausted, was literally hauled down and disappeared. The following day the orcas were sailing up and down the channel as though nothing had happened.

As they leaped into the air when attacking the whale, an excellent opportunity was afforded the spectators to observe their beauties, as this tiger of the sea is a most striking and attractive animal. They appeared to be twenty or twenty-five feet in length, the skin a polished jet-black marble-like surface, devoid of the slightest parasite, smooth and glistening in the sunlight; black above, pure white beneath, a contrast so sharp that when leaping in mid-air and the ventral surface turned toward the observers, they appeared like white whales, while from the opposite side the spectators would have seen

## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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a figure of inky blackness. Rising from the smooth back was an enormous dorsal fin that stood out like a great cleaver cutting the waters, a totem by which the orca could be recognized from far away. Beneath the eye was a clear oblong white or lavender spot appearing like a huge grotesque organ of vision; and as though to emphasize its oddity, the orca had a vivid pronounced crescent-shaped saddle of creamy maroon color just in front of the tail fin and partly encircling it.

I have frequently seen this in contrast with the velvet black of the back, as the big killer swam slowly along with dignified pace always at the surface, its big dorsal, like a lateen sail cutting the air. Generally the animals move in a line four or five in succession, the fins resembling diminutive black sails, conspicuous and menacing. Such a school is a family party, a very large male, several females possibly, and two or three young.

These schools may be seen in summer off the island of Santa Catalina, rarely coming in nearer than half a mile, slowly parading up and down in the lee of the island mountains. I have made various attempts to photograph these animals, but with poor success. But once I had favorable conditions and was nearly on top of them, when one of the party became demoralized at their size and we had to turn back. On another occasion I followed them in a heavy launch and succeeded in reaching a point just

## *Big Game at Sea*

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over the tail of one; but the big creature did not come up, at least within a reasonable distance, but for some seconds I looked down upon the animal as the boat's bow cut through the boiling water occasioned by the working of the screw-like tail just beneath me.

Once I observed the leap of a sixty- or seventy-foot whale in these waters, possibly to avoid its enemies, the orcas. The giant rose slowly and deliberately out of the water until it appeared to stand on its tail on the surface—an absorbing spectacle—then gradually sank into the sea. In attempts to photograph a large whale I followed so closely that the prow of the boat appeared to be almost directly over the tail that was working like a large propeller forcing the tons of flesh along.

There are two orcas well known in the Pacific: *Orca ater*, with its saddle of maroon, and *Orca rectipenna*. The latter is the largest and cannot be mistaken, as its dorsal fin is as remarkable in its way as the upper lobe of the tail of the thresher shark. It is often six or seven feet in length, tall, slender, and rigid except at the very top, which occasionally falls over in the air. The long-finned orca claims the northern regions as its hunting grounds, while the maroon saddle variety is found in warmer latitudes off Southern California, though this is by no means a hard or fast rule. In the North Atlantic is found the *Orca gladiator*, a fierce and relentless creature,



## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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and Eschricht is authority for the statement that this animal, or a specimen twenty feet in length, was seen to kill and eat thirteen porpoises and fourteen seals, the animals being taken from the stomach after capture.

The long-finned orca is a fury in every sense. It roams the seas, enters bays, follows up rivers and preys upon animal life of all kinds, from whales of the largest size to salmon. It has been known to swim near to rocks in hope of snatching seals or sea lions from their rookeries, and is at times successful.

Some years ago a whaler in the Northwest had killed a large whale, and had the animal alongside, when it was attacked by a school of orcas. They doubtless were half-starved, and crazed by the scent of blood that extended away a long distance, probably followed it up like hounds, immediately attacking the whale. The men with spades and lances cut and slashed at them, inflicting terrible blows; yet, despite this, the orcas literally tore the whale from the ropes and carried it off.

The orcas are very clever and intelligent, a fact illustrated in their method of capturing their prey. They know that the breeding season of the seals in the Northwest is a propitious time for feasting, and assemble promptly and play havoc with both young and old. They even attack animals as large and well armed as the walrus, and show their cunning by swimming far under the ice floes, coming up near

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the walrus herd, butting through the ice with tremendous force, and in the confusion seizing the young which have been lying on the backs of their mothers in fancied security. The jaw of the huge man-eater shark, with its many rows of serrated teeth, is a menace, but it does not compare to that of the orca. The head of the latter is extremely powerful, and the heavy jaws are provided with great tusk-like ivory teeth, well devised to crush and tear the largest of animals, its method of attack well justifying the title the tiger of the sea.

The capture of so vigorous an animal as the orca or killer as a sport would hardly appeal to one familiar with its ways. Off the channel island of Southern California, where the maroon-saddled killer, as described, is common, it has never attacked any one, and except on very rare occasions displaying a disagreeable officiousness, demonstrated by following up boats, once chasing a small boat nearly to the rocks, doubtless in curiosity, possibly thinking it was some kind of a whale like itself. But the dignified procession of orcas on certain warm days was so attractive and inviting to certain landmen that they determined to take one, or at least to make the attempt. The party provided themselves with a heavy shark line five or six hundred feet long, a heavy hook constructed for the purpose, and to the extreme end of the line fastened an iron-bound box. The hook was baited with a thirty-

## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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pound amber fish and floated in the pathway of the killers, some ten miles out in the channel. After several days of waiting, a long line of killers came swimming along, and by rare good fortune ran foul of the amber fish and took it. The line was held until it came taut, then four of the fishermen pulled; and that they hooked the huge creature was evident, as it leaped into the air and swung itself so violently that it dropped partly on its side, lashing the water for a few seconds, then sounding. During this brief struggle, the remainder of the school appeared to be intensely excited, darting about as though in search of the cause of attack, then sounding. In a few seconds the line was jerked overboard and the launch plunged ahead, her bow deep in the water, the men going aft to lighten her. The killer towed them four or five miles, then finding it impossible to move the animal or haul it in, or the launch over it, they cast off the line and box. The killer had now reached the deep part of the channel, given by the fishermen as "no bottom," and apparently appreciating this fact, the killer sounded and carried the large white box out of sight. That it exploded under pressure was probable, as it did not come up, at least, was not found, and the big game anglers, who had hooked one of the largest of the sea animals capable of being hooked after the fashion of fishes, returned to shore, convinced that a "killer" could not be stopped, at least in this manner.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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Killers have been harpooned on the California coast, but the oil taken does not justify the danger of the chase. It is not difficult in summer to creep upon them. A large whaleboat was put within ten feet of an orca, the harpooner successfully tossing his weapon into it just back of the saddle. Into the air went the vicious and powerful tail of the orca, just missing the boat, fanning the atmosphere a few seconds, then disappearing with a force and speed that was ominous. The "starn all!" of the whalers was shouted at the second of impact, and the double ender shot backward, as the harpoon's thud sounded. Like a snake the coil of rope leaped into the air, and the old whalers stared at the rapidity of the movement. It appeared like a nebulous cloud, a phantasm of indistinct snake-like coils poised for a strike.

This killer evidently assumed a position twenty or thirty feet below the surface, and for some time ran like a racer, coming slowly to the surface to breathe, then to drop and renew the rush from this unseen and terrible enemy that was clinging to its very vitals and could not be shaken off. The killer finally carried them into a heavy sea where the pace was so fierce and uncompromising that they took everything as it came. No rising over seas here; they hit them strong and full, cut and bored through them, the spray caught by the wind beating against their faces and like specters of the sea rising from the crests of waves to beat them back. The fishermen laid back

## *A Tiger of the Sea*

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on the line and hauled, one dropping off to bail now and then, but despite every effort they could not gain a foot. For some time this sea tiger ran madly through the seas; now on the surface, where the tail fin cut the water like a knife, then plunging down, as though with the demoniac idea of carrying the unseen enemy with it; but being an air breather, it was forced to the surface to plunge again and again into the heart of the Kuroshiwo.

The sea rising under the strong west wind, the channel was filled with white caps. The orca seemed to gain strength with the contact, and sped on and on until the patience and endurance of the men was about exhausted. The open sea was before them, still no one said cut away, though it was evident that if the orca was killed, it could not be towed in through such a sea to port, ten miles distant. What could be done? They gave a mighty haul on the steel wire-like rope; the loud chanty was swept away from their lips by the wind, then without warning the tension of the wire relaxed, the game rushed savagely to one side, came up into the air, as though in fear, and fell, a slack line telling of the finish.

Whether the orca had been killed or carried off by a huge shark, or whether a companion had cut the lines was never known; but many were the views and opinions as the boat fell away before the strong west wind and ran down the channel for the little bay, hull down, seemingly on the edge of the world.

## CHAPTER IX

### BIG SHARKS AS GAME

**T**HE shark is not generally considered a game fish, but rather a loutish scavenger, a bait-taker, and a general nuisance, to be hauled in, strung up, and executed with derision. Yet, despite its reputation, I am inclined to champion this maligned boneless monster, basing its claims to gameness upon many bouts I have had with it, often single-handed, in various waters from Maine to California.

If one does not undertake shark-fishing in a sportsmanlike manner, there is very little sport in it. The typical method of shark-fishing is to bait a large hook with a piece of salt pork, fasten it to a hawser, and, if it is caught out at sea, trice the shark up to the main-yard, all hands laying on to take part in humbling what they term the common enemy.

So handled, the shark has no opportunity to display its powers. If, however, it is fished for with a recognition of what constitutes fair play, it often becomes a foeman well deserving the attention of the sportsman.



**Bonito Shark, Taken with Rod and Reel at Santa Catalina.**





## *Big Sharks as Game*

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I have taken sharks ranging from sixty to one hundred pounds with a rod and 21-thread line, also with a nine-ounce rod and a 9-thread line, and found it excellent sport; in fact, one of the most exciting contests it was ever my good fortune to have was with an eight-foot shark, which I hooked in Florida when standing almost waist-deep in the surf, fishing for hog-fish. The hard-fighting creature towed me half a mile down the reef before it was brought to what usually would have been the gaff, but, in this instance, was release.

Ordinarily a shark twelve or fifteen feet in length is considered game for twenty men. It is hooked by two or three; the others then take the rope, and the big fighter is run up on the beach helpless; but if a man matches his skill and strength single-handed against so large a fish, a vast amount of sport may be enjoyed. True, it is sport of a gladiatorial kind, a fight to the finish, when the superior animal is often overmatched; but the true sportsman is, I fancy, much more satisfied to be defeated single-handed by a large fish than to be one of a party to take it by unfair means.

It has been my good fortune to catch sharks of all sizes in many waters, and nearly always I have been able to afford the game a fighting chance. When this is done, I can commend the shark as a game contestant. What I mean by fair play is to take all the sharks up to one hundred and fifty, or

## *Big Game at Sea*

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even two hundred pounds with a tuna rod and outfit, which may be briefly described as a sixteen- or eighteen-ounce, seven-foot rod, and six hundred feet of 21-thread line.

Larger sharks, up to one thousand or more pounds and from ten to fifteen feet in length, should be taken with the handline from a light boat; and, assuming that the fisherman delights in lusty sport with more than a spice of danger in it, it can be commended.

Most of my shark-fishing has been done on the extreme outer Florida reef, the home of various kinds of sharks, ranging from so-called man-eaters, thirteen or fourteen feet in length, to ugly shovel-nosed sharks ten or twelve feet long; yet the legends of the reef did not record a single instance of a tragedy from these fish. I was once witness to the sinking of a boat off a certain favorite fishing point where I had often, by pouring over beef blood and other "chum," conjured up a seething maelstrom of these hounds of the sea; yet the three men forming the crew, whom it was impossible to save, and who drowned, were not touched by the sharks which infested the place.

Of course, every sportsman who came down the reef to this jumping-off place in the direction of Yucatan was entertained with weird stories of conflicts with sharks and taken out shark-fishing. The usual outfit for the sport was a light boat, the greener the hand the lighter the craft; and it was

## *Big Sharks as Game*

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considered rare sport among the habitués of the key to see a novice "cross-bucked," as they called it. This consisted of being thrown out of a dinghy by a shark which jerked the line from the bow over the rail, invariably capsizing the boat and forcing the fisherman to leap into the water. As the victim had been duly impressed with the ferocity of the sharks and regaled with stories of anglers taken from boats, this was something of an ordeal.

I had a boat built and equipped for shark-fishing. She was sixteen feet long, of cedar, very light, with a small deck which covered an air tank, while a row of cans along the sides, decked over, made her so buoyant that she would, when filled with water, hold eight or ten men. The line was a small manila rope three hundred feet long, with a four-foot chain and a hook of steel, of royal dimensions.

Thus equipped, two fishermen, eager for a trial of conclusions with the tiger of the sea, would row to a certain point of the reef which juts out into the channel, and anchor by hooking on to the coral a boat-hook which could be easily hauled in. The ancient and honorable chummers of the New England fishing guild would have looked with amazement at the methods here employed to ensnare the largest game. Negroes were engaged to tow out the rejectamenta of a slaughter-house, beef blood was poured overboard, and, not long after, the waters would be swirling with sharks fighting for the food, tearing it

## *Big Game at Sea*

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apart with so much action and expression that a pack of hounds was invariably recalled.

Among these monsters was one whose length was estimated at fourteen feet. I determined to try and capture this individual, but it was difficult to select one when there were so many. A large steel hook and chain with swivel was baited with a ten-pound grouper and adjusted to a float so that it hung four feet below. Hardly had this drifted clear of the bristling coral when it was the object of attention on the part of several sharks. They did not rush at it after the approved method of the shark in the popular story, but with deliberation, guided by unerring sense of smell. Ahead of them, darting here and there, was an advance guard of several pilot-fishes; while each shark had its bodyguard of remoras—black, eel-like creatures, which clung to the dusky sides of their hosts like leeches, their slender bodies writhing and twisting as they were towed along and presenting an attractive appearance.

Several sharks of comparatively small size approached the bait, which was deftly jerked out of their way whereupon they would turn clumsily, wheel about, and try again. Finally, up out of the deep sea came the great man-eater, looking so colossal that one felt that it would be a matter of chance whether it could be brought to terms. It swallowed the huge bait at one gulp, swinging its head to one side with an impatient movement as the serrated teeth crunched

## *Big Sharks as Game*

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upon the chain. As my companion lifted the coral hook I paid out the line until perhaps ten feet had been taken, and then jerked the steel point into the monster's throat.

The response nearly carried me overboard. Though well prepared for it, I was thrown against the rail upon my knees, and was elbow-deep in the water before I could relinquish the line, which went over the side with an ominous hiss. The stout manila rope, carefully coiled forward, went leaping into the air like an endless snake as my companion turned the boat in the direction of the flying fish and stood ready with the oar to steer her directly in its wake. The shark would have taken the entire line had I not seized it with a piece of canvas when about two hundred feet had gone, stopping it with a turn, first seeing that it had slipped into the notch in the bow made for the purpose.

The first rush of the shark, indicating its alarm, was in the nature of a stampede, in which every shark in the vicinity, apparently, joined; so that for a while our boat seemed to be the center of a shark brigade. I could distinctly see their forms beneath and on each side of the boat flying along with us. The effect of checking the line was possibly to enrage the stricken shark; it crowded on more speed and pulled the light boat down almost bow under, so that the deck was nearly flush with the surface, and on each side rolled a wave of foam as though from a launch.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The shark had, either by chance or from knowledge, turned into the outer channel, which led directly out to sea, and was momentarily edging into the deeper blue channel which was one of the arteries of the atoll. It became necessary, therefore, to slack away the line. I was doing this when, without warning, the monster made a terrific lunge. Perhaps it had been attacked by some even larger shark, or had suddenly awakened to its danger; in any event, it bore away about fifty feet of the line with a rush; then, turning quickly, jerked the rope from the slot and over the gunwale amidships.

It was a trick well devised—if, indeed, it was a trick—and well carried out, and had I not been able to slack away the line at once, the boat would have filled. As it was, the water poured in as we sprang to the weather side, now in air. As I let go the line the boat righted and the rope went whirling and hissing out. It was a moment's work to slip it into the notch again, and away we went in the original direction, the boat a third full of water.

The channel ran to the north for half a mile, then turned to the westward and spread out into a wide passage of unknown depth. The shark, apparently, was making for the open sea, and once it got where the water was five or six hundred feet deep it would sound, and nothing could stop it. It was necessary, then, to turn it, if possible, before it reached deep water; so we took up the line and heaved, bracing



**Big Hammerhead Shark.** Length 8 feet, 5 inches; weight, 200 Pounds. Caught at Avalon, Santa Catalina Islands.





## *Big Sharks as Game*

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back hard against the seat; but after working ten minutes the only perceptible effect was that we were going faster, while the line was so taut that it hummed like the string of a musical instrument. We then shipped the oars, my companion holding and backing them against the fish, and a bucket was tossed over and towed.

These expedients seemed to urge the shark to further efforts, and on we rushed, headed for the outer sea. It was manifestly impossible to stop the shark, and we had the alternative of being towed an indefinite distance or of cutting the rope. Two miles ahead was a fishing-boat, so we decided to continue the struggle until she was reached—hauling on the rope; making a foot, now and then, but more often losing two or three.

After perhaps another mile the bucket and the oars had evidently made themselves felt, and there was a noticeable relaxation. The shark was rising; either it had met a shoal reef and was climbing its banks, or it was losing strength. We assumed the latter, and hauled the boat upon it, foot by foot. Before we had gone another mile I could see the dusky form, not ten feet below, swimming sturdily along with a powerful movement of its tail, the pilot-fishes and remoras still alongside, as though nothing unusual had occurred. I held the rope in the bow, with knife between my teeth, ready for an emergency, lifting when I could, and my companion, coiling the slack

## *Big Game at Sea*

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amidships, prepared for the rush which we knew might come at any moment.

We had been towed perhaps three miles against the obstacles, and finally saw a gleam of white and felt that the finish was near. Giving the word, we both hauled with all our strength, and were repaid by the clank of the chain against the keel—the game was ours. But not yet. The monster rolled over several times; then, feeling the bow against its nose, turned and seized the cut-water in its cavernous mouth and crunched it, driving the serrated teeth into the wood. Then, hanging on like a bulldog, it made a rush ahead, lifted the bow out of water and almost capsized the boat. My companion very nearly lost his balance, and, thinking that we were going over, hailed a fishing-boat about two hundred yards distant; but we righted, and grasping a heavy oak gaff, I thrust it into the maw of the shark and fought it off. I had the chain in a firm grasp with a turn, and the mouth of the man-eater was not more than three feet from my face, as terrible a living guillotine as could be imagined. Row after row of serrated teeth could be seen, one row erect, the others lying flat except when in use, and forming a veritable pavement.

To handle such a shark, weighing perhaps fifteen hundred pounds, was no easy matter, as its mere weight was an obstacle to progress. The game had been brought, theoretically, to gaff, but to land it was

## *Big Sharks as Game*

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another proposition. The size of the jaw and the complete equipment of porcelain-like teeth were the incentives, and it was decided to attempt it. The man-eater was triced up to the bow, and would have to be transferred to the stern to tow. During our attempt to accomplish this it turned the tables on us and almost swamped the boat.

All this time the line had not been lifted from the slot in the bow, and it was necessary to do this with dispatch and transfer it to the scull-hole in the stern without giving the shark any slack or opportunity to break away. The moment was selected after a paroxysm of whirling and rolling, which, thanks to the freedom given by the swivel hook, it could do. My companion placed the line in the stern, and at the word I released the chain, sprang to the stern, and hauled with him; but the shark, feeling itself apparently free, dived beneath the boat. It had perhaps eight feet of line, and jerked the stern down with so much force that the boat was again a third full before the line could be slacked away. We held on, and within fifty feet stopped the shark and held it until the boat was bailed out. Then, again, began the work of hauling in, this time up to the stern. When within ten feet of the latter the shark began to swim doggedly along, heading up the channel; and in this position we sat, holding the line while our huge steed towed us within half a mile of the point from which we had started, where, after

## *Big Game at Sea*

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having hauled us in all perhaps five miles, including circles and rushes, it gave signs of weakness; its struggles almost ceased except for an occasional lunge, and from here it was towed in; yet this occupied nearly two hours, owing to its repeated lapses from the quiescent state.

Reaching the beach, the line was tossed ashore, and two score men pulled the shark up on the sands, where it was found to measure between thirteen and fourteen feet in length; but it was the girth of the monster which made the greatest impression upon the average observer. It was impossible to weigh the huge creature, but few of those who saw it placed the weight at less than fifteen hundred pounds, and every ounce of it was game.

On the Californian coast the Bonita shark abounds, and in the neighborhood of Santa Catalina they afford great sport.

Recently several large Basking sharks have been taken on the Californian coast; one observed by me measured nearly thirty-five feet in length, small compared to some which reach fifty or more feet in length on the Atlantic coast, where there was a large and important fishery a century ago.

The progressive Japanese established a shark fishery at Monterey some years ago to catch the members of a large school which lay off that part in summer; but the first shark they caught came suddenly to life and killed several men, and

## *Big Sharks as Game*

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so utterly ruined their boats that the fishery was abandoned.

An acquaintance of mine stated that once in Monterey Bay a huge specimen of these sharks followed him about for hours, becoming so attentive that he came in shore. This shark, which was estimated to be thirty or forty feet in length, placed its head directly beneath the rudder of the launch about three feet down and held that position.

These huge creatures are harmless, having extremely small teeth, and doubtless live on sea weed, and on small fishes and animals of various kinds. The specimens caught off the Southern California coast became entangled in nets, involving great loss to the Portuguese and Italian fishermen.

At Santa Catalina sharks of remarkable size are taken with rod and reel, and in other ways—it being not unusual to see huge Grouper sharks, twelve or fifteen feet long, brought in by anglers, while Mackerel and Thresher sharks, Hammer-heads, Oil sharks, and many more fall to the anglers especially in September, when the big game comes in from the outer sea to prey upon the schools of fish which abound in the vicinity of the island.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HIGH LEAPERS

**T**HERE is probably no question associated with angling, especially sea angling, about which observers differ so radically and materially as that of the leaps or jumps of fishes. This is due possibly to the temperament of the observers. Some anglers see marvelous things when under the excitement consequent upon the landing of a large fish. I have heard an angler, who was known to be thoroughly conscientious when not under the uncanny influence of St. Zeno, relate, when fishing, the most extraordinary tales of what he had seen; and the deplorable part of it was that he thoroughly believed that he had been a witness to these marvelous and impossible experiences. With this and other pernicious examples in the perspective, I approach the subject of leaping fishes with caution, calmness and self-control that would not be possible to the layman who jots down in his memory, not what he really sees, but what he thinks he sees and would like to see.

The most stupendous of all leapers of the sea is the whale—but the whale is not a fish. I have seen a

## *The High Leapers*

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monster weighing hundreds of tons, possibly eighty feet in length, rise slowly and deliberately out of the water until it appeared to be dancing on the surface, almost clear of it, then sink slowly back. Such a leap is on record in the annals of the British navy. A large whale cleared a boat, going completely over it, an estimated leap of twenty feet in air—how many in a lateral direction was not known.

The leaps of fishes are usually of three general classes: they leap in play or sport, to escape from an enemy, and in feeding. In the second class we find most of the great game fishes, as the tarpon, king fish, black bass, shark and others. No better place to observe leaping fishes could be devised than the lagoon of the outer Florida reef, or the inner bays or lagoons that stretch along the low coast of Texas. Here the water is very shallow, ranging from four to fifteen feet—often shallower; and when drifting in this enchanted region in search of certain channel bass holes, which my boatman assured me were there, I believe I have seen some very remarkable leaps. I cannot say that I was perfectly cool, in a literal sense, as the mercury was up among the eighties, as it often is along the Texan coast in August, but I was absolutely calm as my boatman dropped anchor by a certain hole and I prepared to give battle with the gaff-topsail cat fish, king of all the bait stealers.

I had barely cast my first shrimp when I saw a fish shoot out of the water at least fifteen feet to wind-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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ward. It came through the air like a flying-fish and landed in my boat, not a foot behind me, at which the boatman, a calm and meditative man, a philosopher from 'way down near the Rio Grande, who was opposed to work on general and well-founded principles, remarked that we were not "skunked."

This fish was a pompano, and in a few moments another left the water near the same place. I noticed it at the very second of its rise; saw it gradually go up until it was four feet from the surface when it deliberately turned, or fell over upon its side, and came sailing along, after the fashion of a California flying-fish; at least the broad surface tended to bear it up, just as the wings of a flying-fish support this large and heavy fish, and it came cutting through the air and, to my amazement and the grim delight of my philosophical boatman, dropped into the boat.

So I am prepared to say that the pompano can leap fifteen feet into the air, but whether the turning to obtain the benefit of its flat surface was accidental, or with a purpose, I leave the reader and the modern nature writer to decide.

These pompanoes were doubtless alarmed and were attempting to escape from some enemy, and on that eventful morning four or five fishes jumped into our boat. This is often the fate of the mullet, which is a graceful leaper covering four or five feet under pressure—the school rising like rippling silver.

The leap of the sardine is a dazzling performance,



## *The High Leapers*

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and my boatman at Santa Cruz, California, told me that once in drifting over a black school of anchovies, similar to the one I was then watching, a big whale came shooting up beneath them, probably engulfing half a ton and demoralizing the school to such an extent that the anchovies nearly filled his boat by pouring into it—the whale just missing it.

Comparatively few anglers have taken the tarpon, the very prince of leapers. Its splendid bounds into the air are always made when hooked, and often in play or in pursuit of its prey. Tarpons differ much in their leaping power; in my own experience, it is the long slender fish which excels. Who can calmly and stolidly analyze such a jump, such a stupendous exhibition of lofty tumbling? I confess that I cannot; and would not if I could. When the Silver King is in the air showing its deep red gills, I am there too, drinking in the excitement of it, and frankly, what I record is what I *think* I saw, and I believe it to be as near the actual facts as one can make them.

There is no hard and fast rule for the tarpon. The moment it is hooked its stupendous tail sweeps the waters and forces it up into the air. If the fish is pointed upward it may shoot ahead, rising gradually four, five, six, eight, ten, or even more feet, and cover from ten to thirty feet in a horizontal direction. Such a leap I observed at Aransas, when fishing with a short line. My fish rose directly before me and so

## *Big Game at Sea*

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near that the spray went splashing over us. The next second I saw the tarpon over my left shoulder, going through the air like a meteor, and I believe in that jump it cleared nearly fifteen feet. I was near the long jetty, and the next moment my tarpon was crossing the channel in a series of splendid bounds, like a band of silver, dashing over the green and red waters until I had lost nearly six hundred feet of line, then it turned, and still leaping occasionally, came around in a great circle.

It is well to quote some one else when one's imagination is inclined to soar into a mental empyrean. It has been my good fortune to meet Mr. F. T. Reed of Oklahoma, who impressed me as a calm and judicial angler, and who is one of the most skillful patrons of St. Zeno to be met either in Florida, Texas, or Santa Catalina—all of which grounds he fishes and fishes well. Under the stand of Mexican Joe, I met Mr. Reed and Mr. L. G. Murphy, who won the tarpon record in July, 1906, and the former related the following:

“While at Aransas Pass last summer I caught a good many fish, and my opinion is that I have seen at least ten feet of blue sky between the fish and water while on the turn, and have had as high as nine or ten good jumps from a long, lean fish. I saw a hooked tarpon go on to the finished jetty at the Pass. Also hooked and landed one that jumped *over* the jetty where it was not quite completed. Think I

## *The High Leapers*

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have seen them jump twenty feet in distance when coming toward the boat on slack line. Tarpon while feeding on their natural food rarely, if ever, go over four feet in the air. I have seen on several different occasions the channel between Mustang and St. Joseph Islands at the Pass, fairly alive with leaping tarpon, who were coming down with the shiners and knocking them in every direction. The fish were so plentiful and were out of the water so much that it was dangerous to row a boat among them."

Few anglers have taken as many tarpon as Judge A. W. Houston, of San Antonio, and I have had the pleasure of fishing with him in the Aransas Pass. In the evening at the old Tarpon Club (now, no more) we often exchanged opinions and experiences regarding the leap of the Silver King. As to his own observations he said:

"The leap of a tarpon is so attractive and exciting, especially when he has been hooked, that one is very liable to overestimate the height which he attains, and I shall therefore be so conservative in my estimate as not to exaggerate the facts. When first hooked, I am sure that I have seen them leap fully ten feet above the surface of the water. While sitting in a chair in my fishing-skiff I have had one jump over my head, which must have required him to attain a height of between five and one-half and six feet from the water level. I am sure, in my experience in landing about three hundred of these fish, that I have often

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seen them attain a much greater height. I have what I consider perfectly reliable information that a tarpon leaped over the rail and on to the deck of a Gulf Steamer (Morgan Line), which required it to attain a height of from fifteen to eighteen feet. I did not see this incident, but from my observation of the fish I should readily believe the statement."

J. C. Van Blarcom, Esq., of St. Louis, who has had a wide and interesting experience with the tarpon, writes me: "On one occasion I was sitting in my boat, about thirty yards back of a friend who had hooked a tarpon, and at a distance of sixty yards from his boat the tarpon made a leap, which I witnessed, and as my friend was holding his rod, which was seven and a half feet long, perpendicularly, I was able to approximate the height of the leap from the fact that from where I sat looking over the *point* of the rod, the fish made his turn from two to three feet clear above the point. According to my figures this leap was eighteen feet in the air and I do not think I am more than a foot out of the way."

It should be remembered that these anglers are not callow sportsmen, or green hands, but skilled anglers who have observed the splendid leaps again and again. I have seen a tarpon hanging in the air, parallel to the water, ten or twelve feet, I believe, above it, and coming on at an unknown speed, thrashing the steel-like tail to the head and back, to drop into the water with a surge and roar. Again I

## *The High Leapers*

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have seen the fish rise head first, like a tuna, come out and turn gracefully. I have seen them belly up, beating the hot air with tremendous blows; indeed, the experienced tarpon angler has seen the fish in every position, and possibly the jumps observed by Mr. L. G. Murphy were the most spectacular, at least of any which I recall. He stated that he hooked a tarpon at Aransas, a six-foot fish, which made a series of six leaps across the channel, each of which was at least twelve feet in height—a magnificent series of aërial performances; and when I say that Mr. Murphy has taken twenty-four tarpon in a single day, and holds the record as well for the largest black sea bass rod catch in the world, four hundred and thirty-four pounds, it can be imagined that he is not an imaginative or excitable person. When fishing in the St. John's River, Florida, for tarpon in 1876, I was told by an officer of the steamer *Ella Morse* that a tarpon sprang aboard of her and landed in the lap of a man who was sitting on the upper deck in front of the pilot house; and any one who knows the tarpon, who has been on intimate terms with it, can well believe that none of these incidents suggest the limit of its powers as a high jumper.

Perhaps the most extraordinary leap of a fish I have witnessed was that of the big ray or *manta*, which has an enormous square surface, the contact or return being a remarkable spectacle. I believe I have seen a manta fifteen or eighteen feet wide, five

## *Big Game at Sea*

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feet *clear* in air, but would not be willing to make affidavit to it, confessing to more or less excitement; and I have had a big one leap so near my boat at night, in a lagoon on the Florida reef, that the return of the fish made waves which almost capsized the boat. The manta has huge, outspreading wing-like fins, a long ox-whip-like tail. In air or water it resembles a huge bat, and in course of aërial flight, its wing-like fins are bent in graceful undulations; altogether, when near at hand, not a reassuring spectacle, except to the few men who enjoy the sport of its capture.

Many of the rays are notable for their acrobatic feats. In Texas a big calico ray, spotted like a tiger, came within a few feet of jumping aboard my boat, and if I had had sufficient patience the feat might have been accomplished, as never was there a more remarkable place for leaping fishes than the shallow lagoon reaching away from Corpus Christi toward the pass at Tarpon.

One of the interesting fishes of Florida and the Gulf is the kingfish. I have taken it at Key West, to the east up along the keys on the edge of the Gulf Stream, and along the barrier reef which forms the last of the lagoon at Garden Key, forty miles west of the Marquesas. I have seen them in the air, but do not pretend to be an authority on the leap, as those which I took were mostly from a row-boat trolling slowly with mullet bait. Under these con-

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ditions they are incomparable game fishes, but not, at least in my experience, jumpers. Judge Houston tells me that they *never* leap when hooked, but when feeding he has seen them go eighteen feet into the air, a record which gives them rank with the tarpon; and Mr. Reed, already quoted, who has a record of fifty-nine tarpon in four consecutive days, told me that the kingfish jumped when trolling from a fast-going launch, a method in vogue at Tarpon, Texas. Mr. Waddell in referring to his experiences at Aransas with the kingfish states that the leaps of the kingfish for the bait trolling at high speed are marvelous. "Without exaggeration," he says, in the *Forest and Stream*, of April 21, 1906, "I have seen them make rainbow jumps fully fifty feet long and twenty high; and once I saw two of them make such jumps at the same instant, and exactly abreast. It was a magnificent sight; although the fish thus jumping seldom if ever misses the bait it is by no means always hooked. It is," continues Mr. Waddell, "curious that notwithstanding its great leaping ability the kingfish *never* leaves the water after it is hooked."

This is equally true of the famous leaping tuna. In twenty years' experience in the tuna country I have never seen a fish leap after being hooked, or after the fashion of the tarpon, and have heard but one angler state that he had seen such a leap. The tuna, which ranges up to fifteen hundred pounds in weight, jumps for pleasure and to secure its prey,

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the California flying-fish—the latter a jumper and soarer of no mean parts. Exactly how high a tuna can leap it is difficult to say. I have seen the water beaten into foam by them four miles distant, and have a photograph showing a fish—a black streak at least a mile distant, high in air—a jump of certainly ten or fifteen feet; and it is my opinion, based on what I have seen, that it is possible for a lusty tuna at full speed to project itself twenty feet into the air and twenty or thirty feet in a horizontal direction. I judge the latter possible from the leap of a big tuna which cleared the kelp and landed high on the rocks at Santa Catalina. I have often stood in the center of a school of leaping tunas and watched them; but the situation is not one suggestive of repose or peace of mind.

The most extraordinary example of their leaps occurred to me about a mile off Avalon Bay. I was in a skiff which weighed not over one hundred and twenty-five pounds, so light that I did not dare to cast my bait, as any of the fishes would have towed me away or capsized the boat; so I stood and watched the equilibrists. They were feeding on a school of flying-fishes, the latter darting into the air like great dragon-flies, passing over my boat, dashing beneath it—scores in the air in every direction; and look which way I would, there were also tunas in the air; no chance leaps, no miscalculations, but each one a perfect angle and line of beauty.



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The flying-fishes were on the surface, and the big game were charging them, churning the blue ocean and beating the still waters into foam that formed a white area acres in extent. In all probability, other tunas were swimming some distance beneath the surface, and these were the leapers. Sighting a flying-fish they would charge upward and, missing it, dash into the air at an angle of sixty degrees, go up, and up, like a gleaming arrow, then with perfect grace turn, and for a tenth of a second hang—a horizontal bar of silver and flashing yellow—one hundred or three hundred pounds of animation; then the head would drop and the tuna would fall into the sea without perceptible splash, having formed a perfect curve. The tunas were everywhere in air. I expected one to drop into the boat, when the experience of Senator Quay might have been repeated, in which a tarpon went completely through the boat; but nothing of the kind occurred, and I stood on the seat at least twelve inches from the water, and saw fishes five or six feet long turn almost as high again as my head; so I believe I am within the bounds by stating that I saw tunas fifteen feet in air. I have seen flying-fishes at least thirty feet in air, but blown there by a sudden gust of wind.

These lines are written between attempts on the Santa Cruz and Capitola coast, California, to watch the leap of the sea-going salmon of the Bay of Monterey. The salmon come here in countless thousands

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in April or May and remain, as a rule, until October. I have taken a number trolling, but due to the heavy tackle they would not leap, though this fish frequently does, clearing several feet. The leap of the salmon in fresh water especially up falls and rapids, is well known.

The rainbow trout is an especially game leaper. Recently in the beautiful Soquel, which flows down from the Santa Cruz mountains, one sprang into the air six inches to meet my hook; and I have known large specimens to make splendid leaps. In the Klamath Lake country, when fly fishing for big rainbow trout, I was much entertained by their leaps, some three- or four-pound fish making a series of jumps in Crystal Creek, where I made numerous and futile attempts to photograph them in mid-air. One fish which I hooked appeared to turn a double somersault. Mr. Alfred L. Beebe, one of the clever fly fishermen of American waters, who has fished the lakes of Oregon for many years, and who has landed a remarkable number of large trout, tells me he has seen a three and a half pound rainbow trout take thirteen successive leaps across the river before coming to the net; and I sat in the bow of a skiff at Pelican Bay for an hour or more trying to photograph the living rainbows which Mr. Beebe lured to his March brown fly and into the air, but failed, owing either to the rapid gyrations of the fish or my own cumbersome methods. It was an exhilarating spec-

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tacle, as following the first rush away, the trout, usually of large size, would surge upward and go whirling into the air, its marvelous tints caught by the sun, blazing and scintillating as the fish reached the air again and again.

The gar is a leaper, going at times into the air eight feet. I have seen the leaping shark at Aransas three feet in air on the end of my line; and the leopard shark of Catalina is a clever jumper when taken in shoal water. Black bass are famous for their leaps of two and three feet—remarkable when the size of the fish is considered. A chapter could be written on the leaps of the lady-fish and the ten-pounder; they are cousins of the tarpon, and members of the circle which includes the most agile acrobats of stream and sea.

The two swordfishes taken with rod and reel in Southern California water are both leapers. *Tetrapturus* fall back clumsily from a leap of three feet, which I have observed, but *Xiphias*, which has been played by anglers here, makes a graceful leap, one having been seen to go into the air four or five feet several times, and up to date none of this species has been landed; their extraordinary fins enable them to break the delicate line of 21-thread, which is used.

## CHAPTER XI

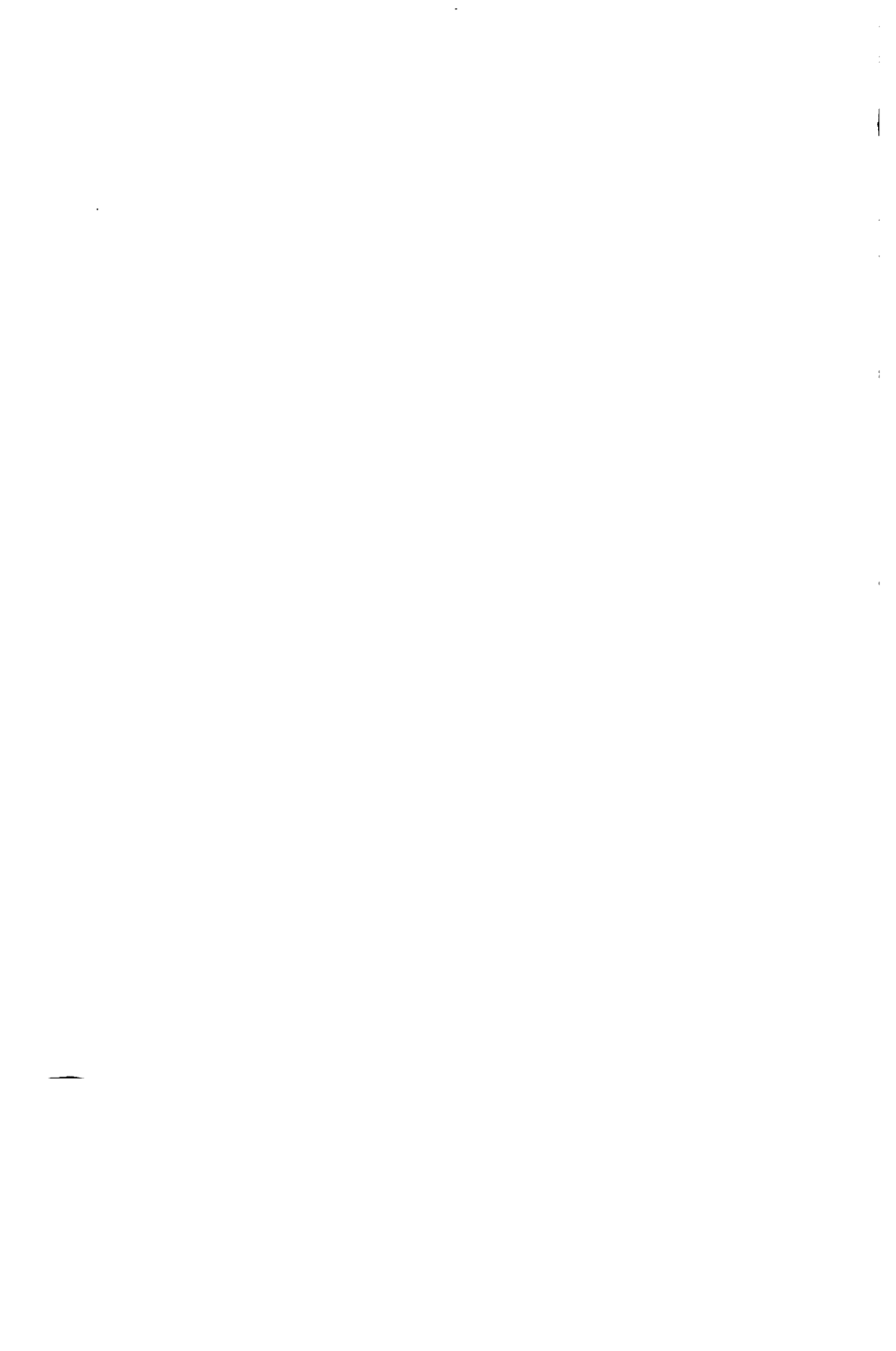
### FISHING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

**R**ODS are not put away during the winter in Southern California, for there are the whitefish, the sheepshead and the rock bass always to be had along shore; but as spring comes on there is greater activity, and the best fishing, the real sport, is in the spring and summer, where the Black Current that sweeps down the coast is tempered by the semi-tropic sun, and the shore is swarming with bait.

The mainland Pacific Coast presents many anomalies. Harbors, coves and bays it has only to a limited extent, the coast between San Francisco and San Diego being, in the Eastern sense, with one exception, without protected bays for the fishermen. The wind blows freshly every day, and the sea rolls in eternally upon long sandy beaches, broken here and there by rocky headlands. To fish with a small boat rigged with a chair, and the conveniences one finds on the St. Lawrence, is almost impossible. The professional fisherman goes offshore in his heavy sailboat from one mile to three, and trolls for barracuda or yellowtail, or sets trawl-lines along the rocky points.



**Mr. Holder Fishing for Sheepshead. Santa Catalina Islands.**



## *Fishing in Southern California*

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In Southern California the water in the morning is often smooth, but in the afternoon the wind rises and the sea comes in. To enable fishermen to reach the fishing and retain their equipoise, many towns and resorts, as Santa Monica, Long Beach, Redondo, Ocean Park, Terminal and Coronado, have built long and expensive piers, which are well patronized by anglers, who fish with long bamboo poles, stout enough to lift a heavy fish, and handlines, and catch surf fish, mackerel, and other small fishes. At Redondo, because of the setting in of a deep channel, yellowtail and sea bass are caught from the high pier, and occasionally a black sea bass. At Coronado the fishing at the pier is for yellow-fin, surf fish and small shore fishes. To obtain larger game the angler goes offshore from one to three miles with the professional fishermen, or to the entrance of the fine bay.

This wharf-fishing is eminently satisfactory to the angler whose piscatorial fancy is whetted by small fry, yellow-fin and surf fish, which can be lifted in by the pole; but California has a series of large game fishes which afford all the sport of the salmon, the muskellunge, the bluefish and the tarpon; and to take them in a sportsmanlike manner, with the lightest lines and rods, requires smooth water and small boats, and to find these one must go to the Southern Californian islands, where the equipment and environment are perfect. These islands, beginning north of

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Santa Barbara, are San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, San Nicolas, Santa Catalina and San Clemente. All lie parallel to the coast, forming a lee to the north and east, where the angler finds almost perfect conditions. San Miguel, Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa are reached from Santa Barbara; all are private property, and permission must be obtained to camp. This and the fact that bait is uncertain, there being no professional fishermen resident upon the islands, and no regular boat, has tended to discourage anglers. One hundred miles to the south, off Los Angeles County, lie two large islands—San Clemente and Santa Catalina—about which nature has done her best for the angler. The location seems to be a favored one, a common ground for all fishes. The islands are about twenty miles in length, Santa Catalina being about seventeen miles from the mainland, and San Clemente, a Government reservation, about forty. The former has fifteen miles of good lee, affording water as smooth as a lake, in a number of bays and coves formed by the cañons. The water is deep along shore, intensely blue, and the fishing on the line of fringing kelp.

Santa Catalina is the only island having a town and regular daily communication with the mainland, Avalon, being well equipped with hotels and cottages—a unique spot, possessing everything required by the angler. The bay is filled with boats and small launches equipped and furnished with every



## *Fishing in Southern California*

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appliance for the capture of the great game fishes of the region.

The peculiarity of this Californian angling is the large size of the fish, their great numbers, the remarkable equipment for the accommodation of anglers—the boatmen being provided with the best rods, lines and reels—and finally the climatic conditions, which afford the angler pleasant weather, without storms, from May to November. The tuna is the tarpon of the Pacific Coast, and is caught only at this island, between Avalon Bay and Long Point, a distance of about five miles. It is an oceanic fish, which explains its absence from the mainland shores. The season is from June to August.

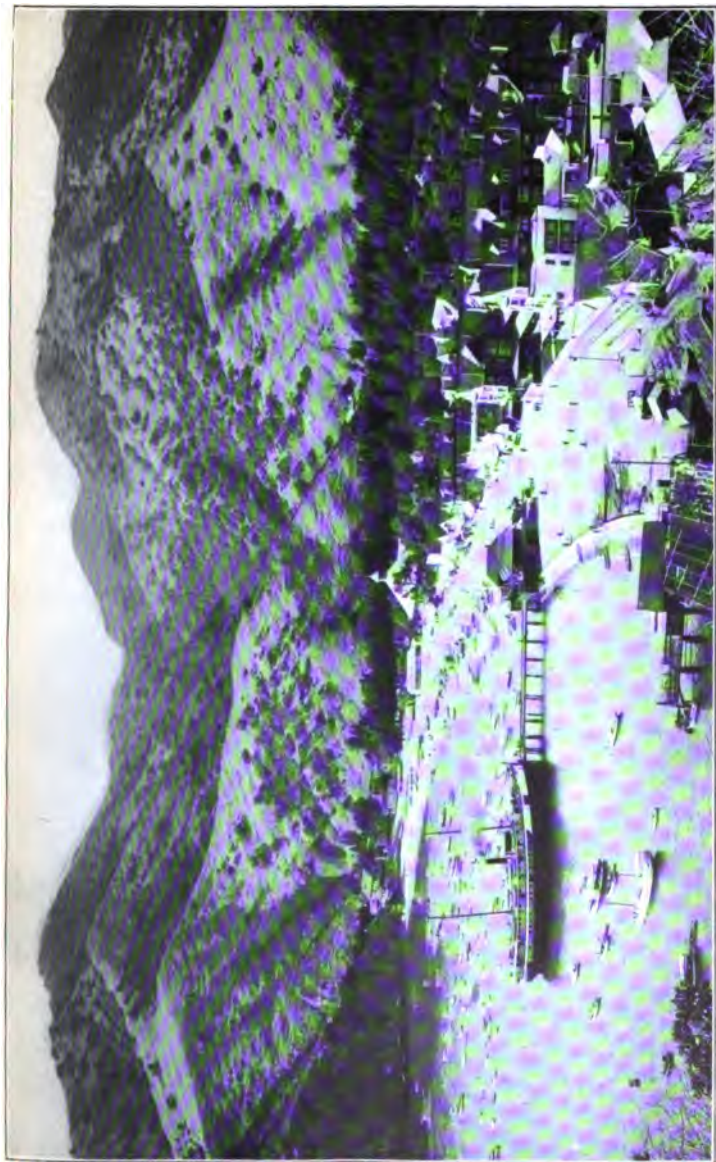
Tuna rods are not less than six feet nine inches, and often seven or eight feet in length; the line not over 24-thread; the tip of the rod, or that portion from reel seat to tip does not weigh more than sixteen ounces. The fishes are divided into classes. The black sea bass, swordfish, and leaping tuna are taken on heavy tackle, but for all others anglers fish with a rod, the tip of which weighs but six ounces, and a line so slight that it would not stand a dead weight of over eighteen pounds, being what is termed a nine-thread line. The reels are strong and good; in point of fact, cheap tackle is the most expensive here. The boat is a large, wide-beamed yawl, with a diminutive three or four horse-power engine, and there are numbers of small launches of similar fittings in the bay.

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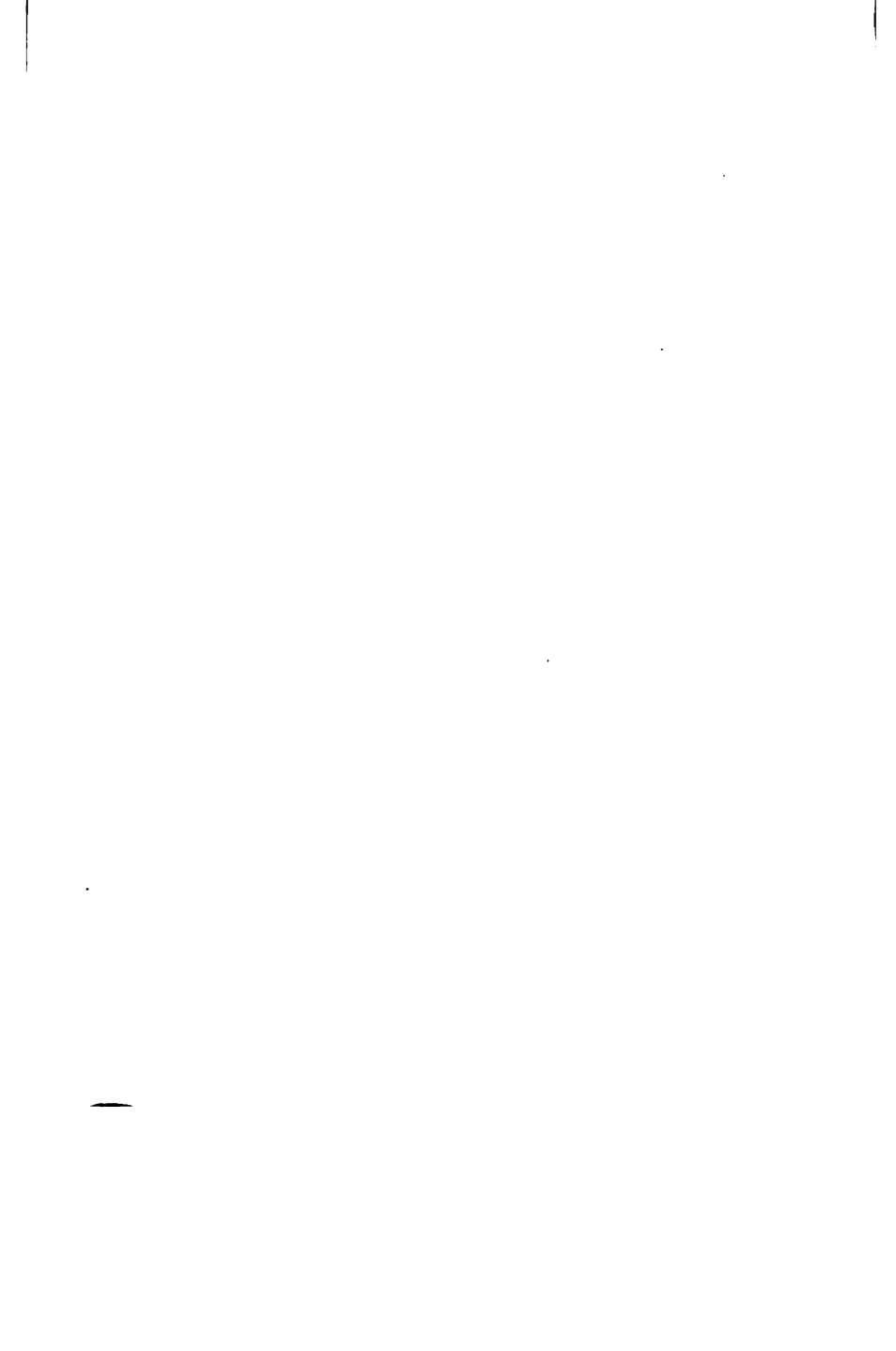
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The boatman and gaffer sits amidships. Another seat extends from rail to rail, with two comfortable chairs facing astern for yourself and companion. Thus equipped, rods in hand, the boat is shoved off and cuts the smooth waters of the bay. It is to be yellow-tail, and the lines are run out sixty feet, the engine slows down to about the rate of slow rowing, the course set along the kelp-lined shore, about which the rocks rise in picturesque bluffs and cliffs, reaching back to melt into the mountains of the interior. It is July or August, but the air is cool, and as far as the eye can reach the sea is like glass.

The anglers are lost in the beauty of the surroundings when *z-e-e, z-e-e!* goes the reel, its high staccato notes rising so loudly that an angler in a boat near by shouts his congratulations. The fish are plungers. Down into the deep blue they go; *z-e-e-e, z-e-e-e-e!* rising on the soft tremulous air, the line humming its peculiar music. Now, started by the big multiplier, the fish comes up, breaking away with feet and inches to again plunge, circling the boat with savage onward rushes. Lines cross, but rods are passed over and under. Ten, twenty minutes have passed away, and as fast as the fish comes in, it breaks away again to the melody of the singing reel. Finally, deep in the blue water a dazzling spot appears; then another, and up they come, by a marvel not fouling. Now one circles the boat; away it goes at sight of the gaff, *z-e-e-e!* to come in again. Five times it circles the boat, dis-



Avalon, Santa Catalina Islands. Home of the Tuna Club.



## *Fishing in Southern California*

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playing its beauties to the anglers; a blaze of glory, canted upward, its silvery belly gleaming in the morning sun, its back an iridescent green, the fins, median line and tail yellow. The boatman is fingering his gaff. "Now, then!" whispers the angler. The tip of the rod goes forward, a quick movement, a blinding splash of water with the last compliments of the yellowtail, and the gaffer straightens up with the fish of fishes quivering, trembling, still fighting, to receive its quietus. "Thirty-two and a half pounds, sir," and glancing at his watch, "in twenty-two minutes."

The common fish is the yellowtail (*Seriola dorsalis*), a sociable fellow, coming within ten feet of the boat to take the bait, playing about in full view, its golden tints flashing with gleams of green and blue. It is usually caught trolling slowly; but from the wharf or from a boat it is often taken by allowing the bait to lie on the bottom. The cleverness and discrimination of the yellowtail are unequalled. Toss over a handful of sardines, and the big fish will dash at them, picking up every one except that containing the hook. In many years' fishing at this island, I have never seen a yellowtail under seven pounds, the largest weighing sixty-three; but a specimen has been taken which, headless and cleaned, weighed eighty pounds.

The yellowtails arrive in March and April, and in midsummer are at the islands in countless numbers. In August last, four rods took sixty of these fish,

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averaging thirty pounds in a day. The record catch is that of Colonel C. P. Morehous, who is credited with a fifty-nine-pound fish. While yellowtail is the *pièce de résistance* of this angling feast, there is another fish in these waters—the white sea bass—which appeals to the angler. The yellowtails, which have been dashing about the boat, suddenly disappear, the color of the bottom changes to dark brown—the cause, a dense school of sardines, which are packed so closely that they seem to be a solid mass. They are being driven up the coast by the sea bass, and a change of method becomes necessary. The dead smelt is taken off and the bare hook cast into the affrighted throng. A slight jerk, and a sardine is impaled, rushing off, as lively a bait as could be imagined. Its erratic actions frighten the rest, which form a hollow down through which the blue water is seen, and into which the struggling bait sinks deeper and deeper, until it clears the school; then out of the unknown rises a mighty fish shaped like a salmon. The sardine disappears as though by magic. *Z-e-e-e, tse-e-e-e-e!* The shriek of the reel, the burning hiss of the line as it cuts the water, the flying leather from the brake tell of game worth the having. The bass cuts a mighty swath in the sardine school, and is away on the surface—no sulker he. Fifty, one hundred, two, three hundred feet of the delicate nine-thread line are jerked off to the measure of the click—music indeed, vibrant, shrill and exciting; then the brake

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stops the fish, and he is away. No, he is coming in, a living, finny charger.

There may be multipliers quadrupled which can eat up three hundred feet of line while this magnificent fish is covering that distance at the top of his speed, but I never have seen one. On it comes, like the shadow of a cloud. The angler sees it as he reels, and knows that it has fifty feet of line towing behind; then suddenly it turns, with a magnificent swirl of its powerful tail, and is away. It is a trick that fails. The thread of line, which would part at the slightest jerk, slips beneath the brake as it comes taut, and the angler fortunately turns it, and the bass circles the boat fifty feet away, its high dorsal fin cutting the water like a scythe. Three times it goes completely around the boat, constantly increasing its pace, but always coming in. The dexterous gaffer begins to estimate the distance, and the angler is about to pass the fish to the position for gaffing, when it turns, and the reel again gives tongue. But this is the beginning of the end. For nearly thirty minutes the bass has played, and is tugging bravely, bearing off like a sturdy craft on a lee shore, its white belly lightly showing. A final turn, a beating of waters, a shower of spray, and the grand fish is held on the cruel barb, to beat the boat powerful blows, to plunge and carry the gaffer's elbow into the water in its last desperate rush. But the gaff is inexorable, and slowly the fish comes up, protesting every inch; and in the sun a

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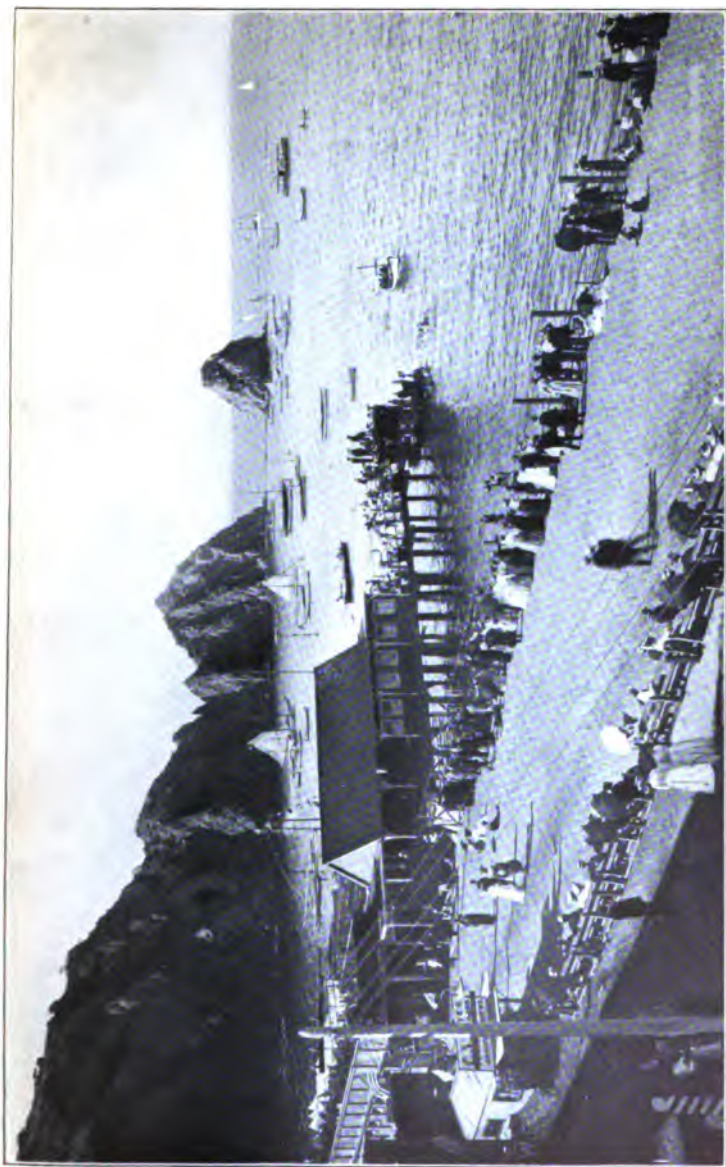
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thousand tints and scintillations seem to flash and play upon it. The belly is white, grading into gray; the upper portion, old gold with iridescent hues; the head a blaze of peacock blue in iridescent flashes to pink and indescribable tints ever changing in the sun. Nearly five feet in length, and tipping the scales at fifty pounds, on a nine-ounce rod, No. 9 line, are incidents in the verdict.

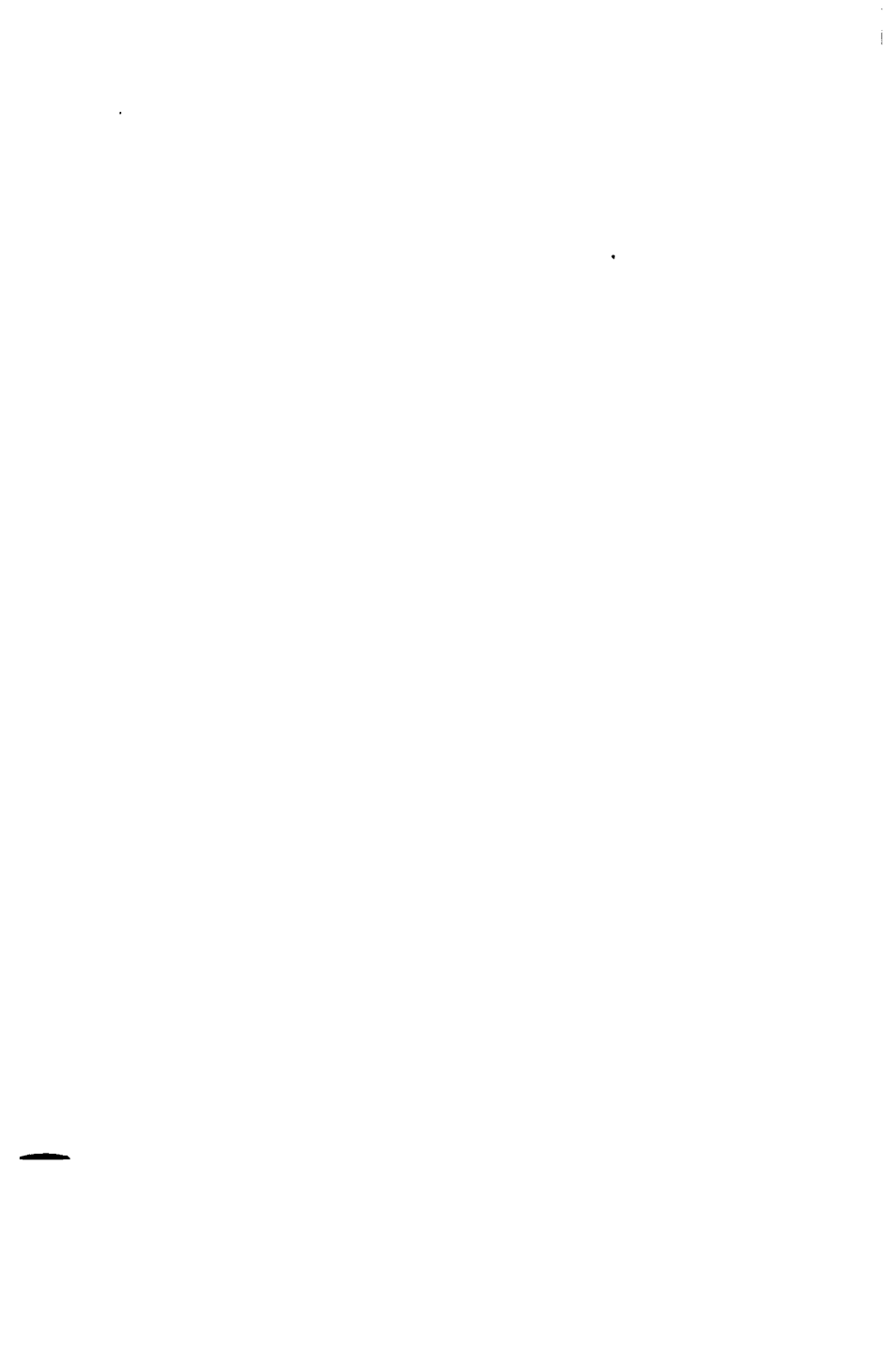
The bass (*Cynoscion nobilis*) is a cousin of the weakfish, and in these waters averages fifty pounds. Four I caught in one morning were all of this weight, or over. Like the yellowtail, the white sea bass is a very sociable fish, some of the best catches having been made twenty feet from shore. But the season is short and uncertain, from May until July. These fishes attain a weight of one hundred pounds. The record rod catch of the Tuna Club in Avalon bay is fifty-eight pounds.

The tuna is game for the veteran, but the inexperienced angler may work up to it by practicing on albacore, a game long-finned oceanic fish found at the Californian islands the year around. A sixty-three-pound fish towed an angler three miles before it could be brought to gaff. If larger game is desired without the extreme excitement of the tuna, the black sea bass affords it. This is the giant of the bass tribe, ranging here up to four hundred pounds. The record rod catch with nine-thread line is a two hundred and thirty-four-pound fish, caught by George Farnsworth.





Crowd at Avalon Bay Watching the Landing of a Big Tuna.



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The bass, like all of its kind, affects the rocks and the great beds of kelp which form halls and parterres beneath the sea, in comparatively shallow water inshore. The boat is anchored in twenty-five or thirty feet of water, and arrangements made to cast off at short notice. The equipment is a single-tip rod, the line a thread of 9 or 21 strand, with long wire leader, and Van Vleck tarpon hook. The bait is four or five pounds of barracuda, or a live white fish. This is cast into the clear places in the kelp, or near it, or suspended three or four feet from the bottom, as the angler may choose; either way accomplishes the purpose and lures the big game. The strike of the tuna is a magnificent rush, sometimes a leap upward, sometimes down; that of the yellowtail a single powerful plunge, a miniature lightning stroke with electric effects; but the king of the bass is more deliberate, reminding one of the methods of the great Mexican barracuda. The line begins to move, to tremble and twitch. A few inches go over the rail, the reel sounds a note of alarm, then another, and the line runs slowly out. Five feet have gone when the angler gives the fish the butt, and the bass gives the retort courteous. I have seen a strong man jerked elbow deep—this on the handline; but with the reel, it means a long musical prelude in various keys, the bass tearing off the line by the fathom. The boatman casts off the anchor buoy, grasps his oars, and heading out to sea, surging through the water,

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towing the boat, the big game is away, and the sport of kings is on.

These fishes have resorts in deeper water from an eighth to a quarter of a mile offshore, and they invariably rush to the groves of deep-lying kelp into which they can dart, soon breaking the line. The oarsman rows against the fish, the angler endeavors to stop the rush by applying the leather brake, and finally a vibrant pumping motion is felt and the bass rises gradually, then comes in, to suddenly turn and break away. The contest may be anywhere from one hour to three; the fish may tow the boat two or three miles offshore and bring it in again, or it may play within a few yards of where it was hooked. Finally the big multiplier wins and brings the fish to gaff; and be the angler a novice, there comes to him out of the depths an amazing fish, a gigantic image of the black bass, fin for fin, mahogany tinted, with silvery belly and large eyes. As it feels the gaff its ponderous tail rises, and angler and gaffer are swept with a small tidal wave. It rises, plunges, tips the boat dangerously, and must be killed before it is brought in, then almost filling the boat. Little wonder that those who fail to see such catches are affected with doubts, as the black sea bass is stupendous, and when hung up at the stand of the gaffer, with the thread-like line dangling from its mouth, and the split bamboo standing against it, it seems incomprehensible that these trifles have killed so powerful, so gigantic a fish.

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These delightful waters abound in small fry that afford excellent sport. There is the sheepshead, ranging up to fifteen pounds, caught within one hundred feet of the rocks, on a twelve-ounce rod; the whitefish, calling to mind the weakfish of the East, a famous fighter, especially in a tide run when the bait can be cast down the tide. With them is the rock bass, almost identical in shape to the black bass, as gamy for a while, but without endurance. They attain a weight of ten or twelve pounds and afford fair sport. At San Nicolas Island the rock bass are very large and gamy, and there are several kinds. San Clemente is famous for its whitefish, yellowtail and sea bass. In these waters is found the barracuda, smaller than the Gulf of Mexico form, rarely exceeding twelve pounds. They are taken slowly trolling, and with an eight- or ten-ounce rod sometimes afford excellent fishing.

The vicinity of Monterey is a famous locality for angling. The streams abound in trout and the bay in salmon from early spring until late in the fall. The latter fish appear in a series of runs, governed by the bait supply—sardines and anchovies. The tackle must, in the majority of cases, be a stiff rod, as a heavy sinker, weighing from a quarter to half a pound, is often used to take the bait down to the level of the salmon, which do not play on the surface like the yellowtail, but lurk beneath the big school of sardines. Fairly smooth water is found in Monterey

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and Santa Cruz bays, and from four to fifteen salmon have been taken in a day by a single rod, the fish weighing from ten to forty pounds.

If the fishes of Southern California disappoint the angler, it is because, possibly, of the tackle, as the average visiting angler fishes with a stiff rod. My own rods, which, of course, may not suit everyone, are the result of experience: for tuna a greenheart, or noibwood, single joint, weighing sixteen ounces, about seven feet in length including butt. This is much longer than the average, six feet nine inches being the requirement. This rod is also for black sea bass; the line, a 21-Cuttyhunk. For yellowtail an eight-and-a-half-foot three-jointed rod is used, about nine ounces in weight, not too slender, but pliable, with a No. 9 line. For white sea bass (fifty pounds) a seven-foot four-inch rod, two joints, pliable and light, and the same line. This can be used for sheepshead and barracuda; but for whitefish and ten-pound rock bass an eight-and-a-half-foot light bass rod is used, reel seat above the hand. All these rods have cork or left-hand grips above the reel seat, and are of greenheart. In thus adapting the tackle to the fish, all its game qualities are put to the test, and the angler has the supreme satisfaction of knowing that he has accorded all the advantage to the dumb animal which is affording him so much sport. The salmon fisherman who has landed a fifty-pound fish may consider an eight-and-a-half-foot nine-ounce rod a cruel



The Coast Line of Santa Cruz Islands.





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weapon for this fish, when salmon of equal size are taken with a very long rod, but it should be remembered that there is no comparison between the strength of a yellowtail or sea bass of fifty pounds and a salmon of equal weight. It would be a question of hours to take a large yellowtail fairly\* with salmon tackle, for the water is deep, and the fish takes advantage of it, and plunges into its blue depths.

The introduction by the United States Fish Commission of striped bass into the waters of San Francisco Bay has added another fine game fish to those caught in California. The fish are remarkably good fighters, and are found in such numbers that a striped bass club has been formed. Occasionally the yellowtail ventures into Monterey Bay, and the big sea bass is caught there as well as far down the coast. A new fishing ground has been found at or near Tiburon Island, in the Gulf of California, where sea bass of remarkable size are found and are caught in great numbers from the beach. At Ensenada there is excellent fishing with the rod, and doubtless when Lower California is developed, other fine fishing grounds will be found. When to these are added yellow-fin tuna, leaping swordfish and dolphin the real wonders of this fishing ground are realized.

\* By fairly, not using the rod as a line, is meant.

## CHAPTER XII

### WING SHOTS AT SEA

**I**T was rumored that a certain Venetian had cornered the flying-fish market. Matters were still further complicated by whispers of a trust, and that a privileged few were to combine and squeeze the wealthy anglers. That there was some truth in this became apparent when the flying-fishes, which up to this time had been a drug in the market—flying-fishes which insisted upon flying into boats over night and upon the beach during the daytime—became so scarce that they were quoted at a dollar apiece, while there was a well-credited report that a certain tuna expert and enthusiast had paid five dollars for a single fish. This corner, it was said, was conducted with skill and caused no little commotion in fishing circles, among the adventurous sportsmen who followed the tuna, and their men and gaffers. The leaping tunas were making the sea boil, and bait must be had; yet it increased in price until only the affluent or the very reckless could go out, or those who had the temerity to filch from others the much desired bait.

## *Wing Shots at Sea*

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It was at this season that foraging and stealing became, in a sense, synonymous. An enthusiastic angler, when informed by his boatman that he had stolen the bait on a certain morning, replied sternly, "Foraged for it, you mean. If a man takes another's bait simply to improve on his own, that is stealing; but when the case is desperate, when you or I have no bait at all, when we must have it, why, the act of securing it becomes foraging."

The corner on bait was fast reaching an acute stage when suddenly the market was broken by a boatman who remembered that on the previous season a taxidermist preserved in formalin dozens of flying-fishes, intending to mount them at his leisure. The fishes had merely hardened, and like the mammoth in the Siberian tundras, buried for a million years, was the image of life. This bait, a year old, broke the market. It was sold at twenty-five cents a fish, and proved a fortunate discovery, as the fliers were so well preserved that they could be used over and over again. It was with such bait that I caught the first tuna of the season of 1899, carrying off the prizes, and my boatman others.

But it is not of the tuna that I write, though the subject offers fresh and alluring material, but of the flying-fish as game. This suggestion may bring a smile to the face of the angler who is familiar with the beautiful species of the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, which dart from wave to wave like bril-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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liant insects, and are among the most attractive of the denizens of the sea. The Santa Catalina channel is a highway for these winged fishes, which run in large ill-defined schools, coming up from the south apparently in May, and in June and July forming an interesting feature of the region; springing from the sea with lightsome leap to soar over the glasslike surface in marvelous flight. In crossing the channel in the daily steamer, after April, one sees the flying-fishes constantly flushed. They evidently believe the vessel to be an enemy and dash away from the bow in every direction, affording the observer an excellent opportunity to study the question as to flight—or soaring—which bids fair never to be decided among laymen.

The California flying-fish—*Exocætus californiensis*—is the largest of its kind. It is over a foot in length, and weighs three or four pounds; a sturdy, hard-headed fellow, as clumsy in the water as a gurnard, but capable of several rapid plunges or darts; then, as though fully appreciating its importance, it leaves the water and soars buoyantly away over the blue channel in the so-called flight, but no more a true flight than the leap of the flying squirrel from tree to tree. The tail of the flying-fish is the organ of propulsion. The lower lobe is much the longest, and by twisting this about with a screw-like motion, the fish is forced into the air when the huge wing-like pectorals and the ventrals are spread,

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and the fish becomes a parachute, a living aëroplane, shooting along over the water a foot or more above it. In this way the fish is enabled to fly an eighth of a mile or more; then its tail drops, touches the water, and if the fish is still pursued, begins the screw-like action which imparts to the entire body a wriggling, tremulous motion which for an instant gives to the wings the appearance of flying, and again the fish is in the air. I have seen the fliers in this way move far out of the range of vision in one sustained rush.

The flying-fish is the choicest food of the tuna, and the arrival of the fliers indicates the opening of the tuna season—generally from the twentieth of May to June first. At this time the coast of Santa Catalina island in the vicinity of Avalon is the scene of brilliant charges of these active fishes and marvelous flights on the part of the flying-fishes. I have seen a school of tunas charge a school of flying-fishes, which dashed into the air like a flock of birds, the wind lifting them twenty feet upward, sending them careening away, glistening and scintillating like gigantic insects, to reach within a foot or two of the surface when they moved on, the tunas following beneath them, or swimming slightly on one side, with one eye cast up, never losing sight of the prey, and dashing at it as it touched the water. Some endeavored to secure them flying in the air, and I have seen a tuna come up from below like a living arrow, strike

## *Big Game at Sea*

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a flying-fish in midair and toss it ten feet upward, where it whirled about like a pinwheel, falling dead upon the water, to be picked up by its relentless pursuer. That the tunas sometimes take their prey literally in the air there can be no doubt.

The agility of the tuna and the flying-fish can hardly be credited. In the wild chase the flying-fish soars blindly on, the tuna a foot below, never losing sight of the game. On one occasion a flying-fish so pursued passed over my boat. I saw it coming fifty feet away, and moved my head so that I would not be struck, the fish passing within a foot of my face. As it passed I looked overboard and saw a tuna dart under the boat, and a short distance beyond it seized its prey.

The flier has apparently little or no power to alter its course, or if so, to a very limited degree, as I have repeatedly known them to strike the boat or pass over it; and on one occasion a large individual struck me on the neck. On another occasion a flier passed over the upper deck of a launch so near my face that I could have touched it; and again, one was caught or knocked into my boat and used as a bait for the voracious fish. At times the rushes of the tunas present an exhilarating spectacle; one, under certain conditions, calculated to demoralize the observer. On a calm day, when the sea was like a mirror, I noticed from a hilltop a mass of clearly defined foam three miles away. It apparently covered one hundred



Shooting Flying-fishes. Santa Catalina Islands.





## *Wing Shots at Sea*

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acres and presented a remarkable appearance, as though some submarine volcano was convulsing the ocean bed. It moved slowly up the coast, and I hastened to the beach and jumping into a boat, rowed out half a mile from Avalon Bay in the path of what I soon discovered was a school of tunas which were feeding upon flying-fishes. The magnificent fish were leaping into the air, dozens being seen at one time, turning and falling like arrows. In a few moments I was in the midst of this war of extermination. The flying-fishes were dashing about in every direction, the tunas slowly driving them up the coast. They sought refuge beneath my boat and crowded around it, apparently exhausted, followed by the tunas, which dashed into the air, so near me that I pulled away, fearing that mine might be the experience of the Southern angler who had a tarpon plunge into his boat, passing through it. Such an accident was possible, and I only ceased rowing when on the outskirts of this remarkable center of activity which well illustrated the soaring powers of the flying-fish and the leaping possibilities of the tuna.

It was, possibly, this and other experiences with the flying-fishes which suggested what was certainly a novel sport—the substitution of flying-fish for quail. The tuna flushed the flying-fishes, which flew in every direction, offering similar shots to those one finds afield, so one morning the launch *Linda* steamed out of the bay of Avalon with two or three friends

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and myself sitting on the upper deck, about eight feet from the water, each armed with a shotgun. The agreement was that we should take the fish flushed on the side on which we sat. The man on the port side was to shoot to port, the one on the starboard to starboard. The *Linda* was headed up the coast and was presently running at full speed and in a short time into the flying-fishes, which rose at or near the bow and went skimming away in graceful lines. The first flier went to the left, and was cleverly dropped by one of my companions, who killed another with his left barrel. The third fish fell to me. It rose twenty feet ahead with a vigorous trembling of the body, produced by the screw-like motion, and dashed away three feet above the surface. As it swerved to the right I fired, dropping it; as it fell the splash startled another fish from the water, which came straight toward the boat, rising slightly on the stiff wind. I did not fire, as the fish was too near, and it passed over the boat into the preserves of my companion, who dropped it when fifty feet away.

There was something essentially novel in this sport. The fish appeared as though by magic, shooting out of the water with little or no splash, often apparently sailing along a foot above the surface, which it so resembled that it was as difficult to drop them as it would be the woodcock darting over cover that it perfectly resembled. As the launch neared Long Point—a prominent headland which reaches out into

## *Wing Shots at Sea*

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the blue channel, forming the base of a high mountain—the flying or soaring game became more plentiful. The fishes came from every direction; now dashing up under the cutwater, or again, startled by a tuna, flying head on, or even coming up behind us, though racing with the boat. The bay ahead—the famous tuna ground—was like glass, not a breeze disturbing its surface; yet, as we drew near, great splashes of foam dotted it here and there; and beyond, the foam was continuous, as though a heavy sea was breaking upon the rocks. But the error of this conclusion soon became apparent. The masses of foam were caused by the leaps of the tuna flushing the flying-fishes, which were darting into the air in every direction. In a few minutes the launch was in the center of the commotion, which covered acres of the bay, and the flashes from the guns told of the accumulation of valuable tuna bait, which was in high demand.

While the actions of the flying-fishes before a launch running at full speed may be compared to those of quail, they are more mechanical, and the game goes whirring away more like a clay pigeon, and quite as difficult to shoot, as the fish have, to a greater or less extent, the color of the water and quickly disappear. A few weeks later along these shores, where the kelp formed literal hanging gardens, I found the young flying-fishes, the size of grasshoppers, leaping from the water almost a foot

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in their efforts to escape the bonito, mackerel and other cousins of the tuna.

On one of these peculiar hunts it occurred to a member of the party to take a retriever. The dog soon became familiar with the game, saw the flying fishes with ease, and when one was shot, sprang from its place on the fore-deck and swam directly for the fish, but unfortunately the flying fish invariably sank before the dog reached it, and the only way to secure them was to run the launch to the spot at once, and scoop the game up with a net and haul the barking dog aboard, who was greatly excited and concerned at the disappearance of this new game bird. .

## CHAPTER XIII

### A LEAPER OF THE KUROSHIWO

**T**HE channel islands of Southern California, a chalice of emeralds in settings of azure, were rising in the distant haze. The sea was a mirror in which the heavens were reflected, and the rising sun over the distant and snow-capped peaks of San Antonio and San Jacinto in the mother range drew a translucent old-rose film over it that seemed to set the world aflame. The sky and the edge of the world blended—it was one harmonious sea that like some great monster rolled about the world. Here and there a catspaw made its way aimlessly along to die away. The big wing-like fins of the flying-fish occasionally cut the water or waved above it in some game of the sea, and far away the bonitos were playing havoc with small fry. The high cloud banks were retreating to the west, and forty miles away at sea a pink cumulous cloud-bank rose, dome-like, telling of San Clemente, its dunes, its dead, and its sand glaciers. It was early June in these islands of the sea, the last rain had come, and the hills and slopes were fast fading into umber and the splendid tints

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of gray, yellow, purple and brown that ravish the eye and senses in the Southern California summer.

The oceanic wanderers, the pelagic fishes that had winter and summer homes, were coming in out of the west to the spawning grounds of their choice. They were leaving the banks of Tanner and Cortez—the offshore plateaus—where the tops of island mountains are ever rising under the slow accretion of oceanic débris, and in big schools were ravishing the seas, starting along the surface, menaces to life and fin of the smallest fry.

There were scattered bands of yellowtail in splendid vestments of silver and gold; great concourses of white sea bass whose heads gleamed with all the tints of a Spanish opal; tribes of bonitos in dazzling blues, iridescent armies of albacore with long wing-like fins and staring hypnotic eyes, indeed, this sea of Balboa, this Black Current of Japan as it laved the shores of the Southern California islands was a highway of the fishes. Later than all the rest, larger, more portentous of possible havoc and alarm, came the tunas from where, how, or exactly when, no one knows, but when they appeared there was no mistake, no confusing them with something else. Exactly the direction from which they swam no one could possibly tell, but it was a fancy that they came from the south, from some distant and mysterious region beneath the sea. This spring the anglers had been watching for them for several weeks, the small

## *A Leaper of the Kuroshiwo*

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launches plowing the blue waters to the south, and were all but despairing when, without warning, the tunas came in. A miracle of the sea seemed to have been performed.

For miles the ocean to the south was as smooth as glass, when suddenly it broke into a blaze of foam, acres boiled and blazed in the sunlight, as though some maelstrom had broken out, some vast convulsion that made the ocean boil and tremble. This disturbance begun some five miles offshore, came slowly in, and when the first launch steamed out the men saw the cause—the leaper of the Kuroshiwo was chasing its prey, the flying-fish, driving it in with supernal cleverness, to corner it in one of the open bays of Santa Catalina Island. Nearer the launch approached; the air was now seen to be cut with black leaping forms, and soon, by happy chance or good luck, I stood and watched the acrobat of the fishes.

Few fishes leap for the pleasure of it; the tuna is one, and this school covering acres and made up of fishes of large size, of from seventy-five to three hundred or more pounds, seemed to be in the air most of the time. The leaps were the desperate attempts of the tunas to reach the big flying-fishes, which when seen on the surface from below, would be charged, missed perchance, and the great fish would go darting into the air for ten or more feet, then turn slowly with perfect grace, until the sharp head pointed

## *Big Game at Sea*

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downward, and drop into the sea. Scores of such leaps could be seen all about. I saw a tuna miss a flying-fish but strike it so violently that it was sent whirling like a pin-wheel twenty feet upward. I had been told by cool and voracious observers that they had seen the tuna grasp the fish in mid-air. I never have seen this, but almost every other catastrophe that could befall the game I witnessed during this remarkable scene when fishes were maddened by the lust for blood, and the prey so terrified that they crowded about the launch, clung to the bottom, utterly and completely demoralized by the fierceness of the onslaught of the ferocious tunas. The air seemed to be filled with soaring fishes. They came over the boat. I turned my head aside to avoid being struck, and watched the stony hypnotic eye of the flier as it moved on never swerving from right to left to avoid me. I saw them strike the boat and fall dead, to be seized by the tuna, and saw flying-fishes moving along a foot above the surface, and just below, canted to an angle of 45 degrees the dark green form of the giant tuna, a nemesis that rarely failed to seize the victim.

So fascinating was this feature of the cunning of the leaper that I stood in the center of the ground and lofty tumbling and watched the slaughter of the flying-fishes, fully expecting that a tuna would land in my boat, yet so fascinated that I disregarded what was really a menace; a leaping fish would have gone



## *A Leaper of the Kuroshivo*

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through the bottom of a small boat as though it had been made of paper. But nothing occurred, and none struck the water nearer than a few feet, though in a similar scene, an acquaintance told me that a tuna leaped over the boat. Their method of feeding was easily seen. Many were dashing along the surface of the water churning it into foam, snapping up the flying-fishes; others came up from below and shot into the air, some hitting their prey, some missing them, so that in a glance I could see ten or more of these leapers in the air at the same time in as many different positions, a scene at once sensational and spirited.

The action or movement of the vast school was singular. While it, apparently, had no definite plan and fishes were leaping in every possible direction, the school as a whole was moving up the coast, and at a rate of at least three miles an hour, presenting the extraordinary sight from a distance of ten or twenty acres of fiercely congested water, foam, and spume, moving along over a sea of glass.

Later another school of tunas came in and I met them at the point of the island where the strong west wind of summer came surging in. I entered it from a perfect calm, and as the launch left the blue and entered the rich emerald green waters that characterize this part of the island, twenty or thirty flying-fishes rose from the sea flushed by a band of tunas. The moment they struck the heavy wind, they went up, and up, until they reached an altitude of I judged

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at least thirty feet, an extraordinary spectacle, resembling huge dragon flies glistening and gleaming in the sun. For a few seconds they breasted the wind, high in air, like kites without a string, or gulls, then fell away in a graceful curve, slowly descending to the surface and sailing away a foot above it, doubtless followed by the insatiate tuna. The tunas came in from some distant and offshore feeding ground to the south, following the flying-fishes, driving them before them into the bays, out upon the beaches, and in its madness, I have seen a huge tuna dash into the kelp beds and out upon the rocks. The charge of the fishes is a splendid maneuver, full of martial spirit, dash, and utter abandon. One night my boatman was rowing along near shore when the tunas flushed their game within twenty feet of us. I could hear the initial flutter of finny wings caused by the lashing of waters with the powerful tail, then the fliers came soaring over the boat, one striking me on the neck, almost knocking me from my seat, indeed had not the boatman caught me I should have lost my equilibrium, and for the next ten minutes my companion and I sat in a stooping position with hands over eye glasses to prevent further catastrophe; loud splashes, violent rushes, swift plunges telling the story of the insatiate enemy near at hand, and glancing over the side, streaks and flashes of phosphorescence could be seen, as the leapers dashed hither and yon in pursuit of their prey.

## *A Leaper of the Kuroshiwo*

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To one familiar with the delicate flying-fish of the Atlantic such an experience might seem trivial, but the flying-fish of the tuna, the tid-bit of its taste, is eighteen inches long or more, weighs one or two pounds, and has four wing-like parachutes, which while they are not wings, and the fish does not fly, bear it aloft and support it along the surface at an astonishing speed, and with a momentum that has been known to knock a standing man down. The flier has two pairs of supporting wing-like fins. The front pair measures nine by nine inches, or eighty-one square inches; the smaller ones three and one-half by three and one-half inches each, and tipped at an angle of 40 degrees, poised like a kite, the heavy flier dashes away in any direction from one hundred feet to an eighth of a mile, during which it uses its tail several times for additional stimulus.

The leaper of the Kuroshiwo is an ocean traveler, a bandit of the sea, a swashbuckler, preying upon victims of many kinds. When the flying-fish fails the tuna descends to deeper waters and preys upon young squids, and I have seen it charge these diabolic, ghostly creatures, chasing individuals upon the beach, that were eight or ten feet long. On pleasant days you may find tuna upon the surface off the bay of Avalon, swimming in great schools, one big portentous tuna swimming in advance, forming, with their big dorsal fins out of water, a big angle, reminding one of the flight of ducks or geese. I have run into

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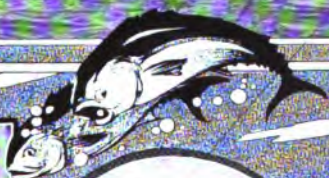
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such a school of titans, six or eight feet in length, seen them coming on, watched them divide on either side, disdaining to leave, merely sinking to rise a few yards astern. A dozen such schools may be seen off Avalon in good tuna years, and I emphasize the good, as there are bad years, off years, when the large fish are rarely caught. At times they are accompanied by albacore, and in 1904 the islands were visited by a large school of allies from Japan, the Japanese Hirenaga, a species of tuna hitherto unknown outside of Japan and Hawaii. They looked like tunas, weighed from fifty to seventy or more pounds, had long saber-like pectorals, and finlets and fins of a brilliant lemon-yellow. They remained for two months, then doubtless sailed for Japan or some foreign port, but have returned every year since.

In these serene and richly-tinted waters of turquoise with their sprinkling of living gems, the leaper and its allies pass the long cool summer. Their only enemy is the big maroon-saddled orca that swaggers up and down the watery rialto of Santa Catalina, an occasional big shark that steals upon them, and the angler, who in gallant fashion throws down the gauntlet as becomes a gentleman enamored with the sport of fair play and high standards, and lures the leaper with a cobweb-like line, when the size of the game and its staying powers are remembered. The leaper is apparently invulnerable and strong. He parades the blue waters during the day, and often at night



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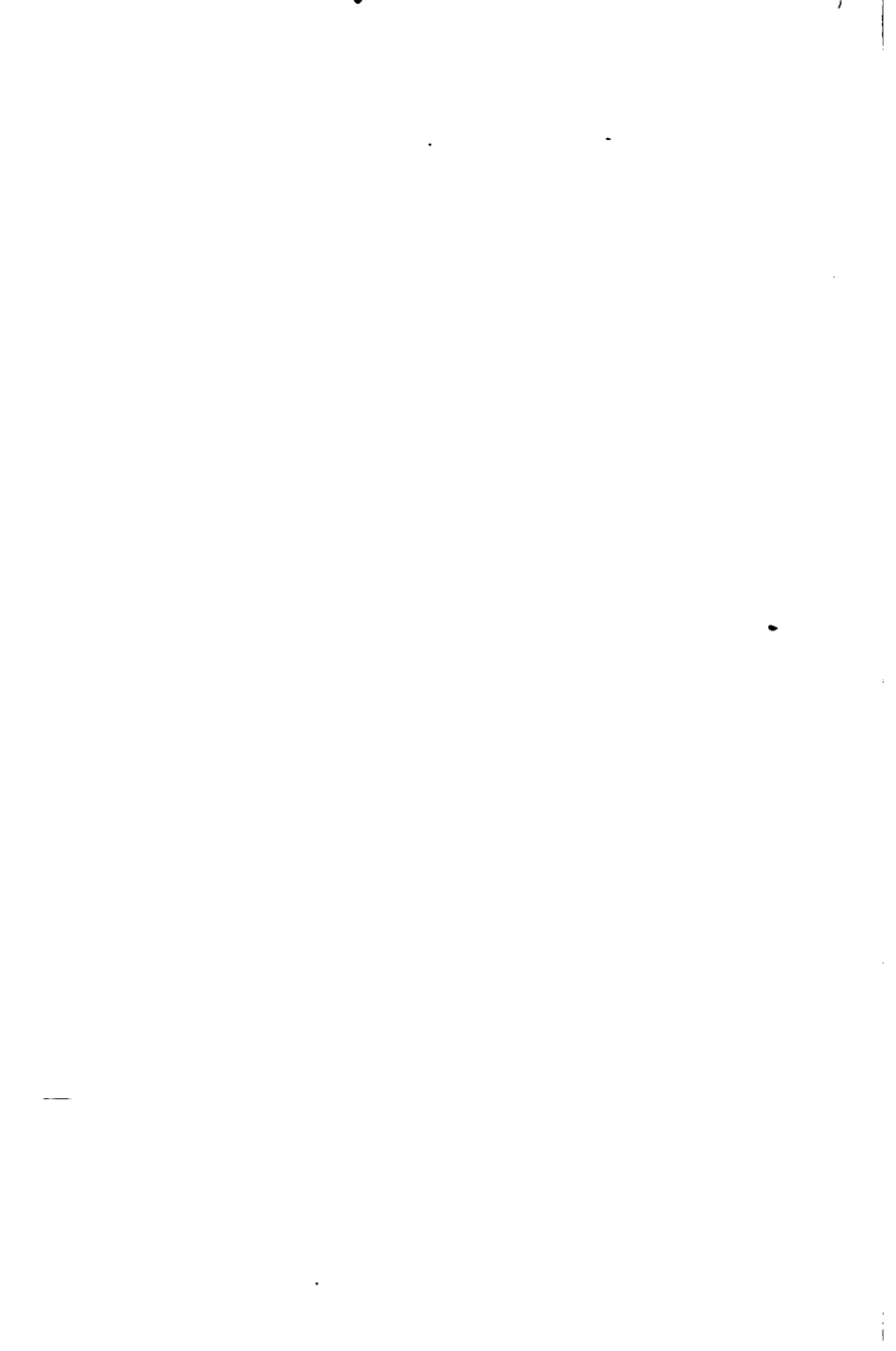


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(1) The Author Playing a Leaping Tuna. (2) Bringing the Fish to Gaff. (3) The Morning's Catch.



## *A Leaper of the Kuroshiwo*

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between day and darkness charges the little bay of Avalon and drives the desperate fliers out upon the beach, into boats, and on to rocks, circling the shores, and is a be-finned whirlwind. It is now that this free lance from the outer seas often meets his nemesis in the angler. The long delicate line, hardly to be seen in the water, is out, baited with a flying-fish. One crosses the path of the leaper; he sees it far ahead and with his mate charges, foaming along the blue, steely waters. The resilient rod bends, the big reel gives tongue, and the game of games is on, often an interminable contest. The leaper is confronted with a totally new experience; he has never been checked. He has been chased by sharks and orcas, stabbed, perhaps, by a vicious swordfish, but this sudden pain, this control by something invisible, comes like a bolt out of a clear sky, and being in six hundred feet of clear blue water, he turns and goes down like a shot out of a gun.

But something is going with him, tending to stop him. For the first time this swashbuckler, that all his life has killed for the pleasure of it, for the mere lust of killing, learns the meaning of restraint, and out of the "corner of his eye" he sees that he is followed by a blaze of white, a sheet of spume-blue water churned into foam by a rapidly towed line. He stops, shakes his head and body, and then plunges on and on with terrific, irresistible force, until he reaches the sandy bottom in water almost as cold as

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ice. The thing is still there. He dashes at the bottom, attempts to brush it away, then, terrified, maddened at the restraint, rises like a rocket, bounding upward to the surface and is free; no, he has merely overrun the thing which now presses on him stronger, harder than ever.

Again he plays, and despite his titanic efforts is stopped. He rises, reaches the surface, gets the direction of the *thing* and charges along the surface, fin in air, tossing the spume, a splendid object, a living catapult. Then into the field of his vision comes the strange object he has seen time and again—the launch, a man in the stern standing up reeling for his life, another looking over his shoulder. This is the enemy he must get away from, and turning, the leaper, never leaping now, darts away carrying the line fifty, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred feet, until the strain becomes unbearable, maddening; then he turns, perhaps in uncontrollable curiosity, perhaps in rage, and charges the *thing* again, and again breaks away, turning so quickly as to toss the spume upon the man. Five or six of these charges I have watched or experienced, splendid exhibitions of skill, well calculated to test nerves of any caliber.

Again the tuna dives into the turquoise sea boring down, but the long slender rod checks him, and slowly he rises until thirty feet from the surface he turns and resolutely swims away performing that



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miracle known to all tuna anglers—towing a heavy boat by four hundred feet of 21-thread line. He keeps this up for mile after mile; now going, now being reeled in, but maintaining a general average of distance. An hour, two, three slip away, and maddened at the eternal strain, the constraint that he has never before known, he rises and charges again, and again rushes away, taking more line.

Down into the deep he goes; now far out in the watery cañon, an oceanic abyss, piling into the unknown where the water is cold as ice; then out from the blue comes a gray ghostly shape, a grouper shark. The shark has caught his scent, sees the gleaming silvery victim in the toils and charges in a vicious manner, and snaps and misses as the leaper climbs up the vault of the watery heavens, climbs with the swiftness of a beam of light, literally between the devil and the deep sea and the thing at the surface.

Reaching the sunlight, he swings around in a circle and catches a glimpse of the boatman rowing with all his might: he must keep the stern of the boat to the fish, and he pulls with one oar; but the leaper dashes away again, and again begins the long pull. Four hours have passed, the tuna is still fresh, is still full of fight, but the insatiate something is always there, always working, holding back, a fearsome thing, and suddenly the leaper realizes that he is standing still, then is being lifted. He makes a desperate, gallant rush, but the thing holds. He dashes about in a con-

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stantly decreasing circle. He is not tired, his heart is strong, but somehow he cannot do anything but pull, strain and swim with dogged perseverance, and the thing seems to be able to pull just a fraction more; so he rises higher and higher and suddenly faces boat and man. A desperate flurry; he plunges, turns, dashes under the boat, gains fifty feet, loses it, comes in, always fighting, then, still alert, he is struck from below, a sharp dagger-like blow that maddens and kills. He whirls away, writhing, rolling over, tosses spray high in air, makes a gallant fight, but the sharp deadly weapon has impaled his throat, lifts him higher and higher. He sees the grim-faced, bronzed boatman step on the side of the boat bearing it down to the water's edge, then, still fighting, is hauled, dragged ignominiously into the air, and dropped into the boat to make a final struggle and die.

Such is the story of a one hundred and eighty-three pound leaper\* of the Kuroshiwo, as he might tell it, from the time he came in from the open sea in June, until July when caught and gaffed after towing me nearly twelve miles, in four long and hard-fought hours.

\* This was the first *large* tuna caught, single handed, with rod and reel. The author landed the fish, but the latter wore him out. This fish resulted in the founding of the Tuna Club and was the record for two years, and it is believed that no harder fighting fish has been taken, though several larger ones have been caught. It was six feet four inches long and weighed one hundred and eighty-three pounds, and when gaffed could apparently have towed the boat many miles further.

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The ending is not always so peaceful; a tuna fought two anglers fourteen hours and then escaped. Another fought an angler, or defied him, for six or seven hours. He was hooked, if I remember correctly, at six in the morning. At noon I was put aboard. The angler was exhausted, and the later efforts of three men failed to subdue the fish. None of us could reel it in. Time passed and as the sea rose we faced the alternative of surrender or being towed across the channel thirty miles to land in the surf. We could have taken the fish in long before by lifting by hand, but the feeling was strong to give the splendid fighter fair play, all the advantage; and no one suggested it until more than discomfort, and the worry a night in the channel would have caused several families, decided us. So we surrendered and hauled the game in by hand, then raised a piece of sail cloth stained in his blood to the boats hunting for us to see, and finally were picked up six or seven miles off shore, out of sight of Avalon.

Another tuna took my lure off Long Point and was conquered in forty minutes with a light rod. The boatman hauled him in, landed him fairly when the fighter gave a tremendous leap, bent like a spring and went whirling into the air, fell on the rail, and I found myself treading water, rod still in hand. The boat shot bow up into the air. My companion, Mr. — of Philadelphia, clasping the bow of the boat as it rolled over, shouting that he could not swim. We

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were a mile and a half offshore, and as the boat refused to float with us all we pushed my companion onto the bottom and the boatman and I started to swim for our launch nearly a fourth of a mile distant. I got ahead, and as the tender came up, the boatman's wife, who was aboard, screamed that he was drowning. I turned and swam back, and in a second or two up he came. "What's the matter?" I cried, amazed at the spectacle.

"I've got your tuna, sir," and out of sight he went again. Three times I saw this fish, still on the gaff, plunge down and carry the plucky fellow out of sight. Gardner had never lost his gaff. If there are angling heroes wanted for the "hall of fame," I commend my boatman, Jim Gardner.

I was soon hauled aboard the tender, a process which took two or three men to accomplish, owing to my lead-like corduroy hunting suit. In the meantime Gardner had his legs about the propeller. As the men held me over the stern I reached down, running my arm deep into the tuna's throat, took it by the gills and gave the word; the men hauled upon my legs, and I the tuna, and dropped it safe in the cockpit; dead? out-fought? never! It was still an animated whirlwind, and drove everyone out of the pit by its wild leaps and lateral swings. I never killed a fish with more regret. It deserved to live, a type of the hard fighters, fighting immortals of the tuna tribe; but it was a prize, the first fish of the

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season, and as I write it hangs on my wall, and I fancy I can see the glint of its hypnotic eye, the steel-like swing of its splendid tail as it wrecked us that balmy morning on the blue Kuroshiwo.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MAN BEHIND THE ANGLER

**T**HE sea angler, the man who goes down to the sea to take big game, is more or less dependent upon the man who sits behind him, his gaffer, or boatman, who, as a rule, if he has been long in the business, is intelligent, clever and often possessed of an individuality which materially adds to his patron's sport. As a rule, the gaffer's duty is to row; on the St. Lawrence he is the man behind the angler. He makes or unmakes the creel; he knows where the bass or "lunge" are, and goes there. He is as interested in making a catch as the angler, indeed more so. He baits the hook if live bait has been decided upon, nets the fish, and at noon on some one of these fascinating islands cooks a fish dinner fit for the gods, or Lucullus, or both.

The sport of angling has become so firmly established that the gaffer and boatman is a profession, well honored, and no little rivalry is maintained in securing certain men on the various great fishing grounds. The poor men are weeded out, and if the angler to-day can find a boatman who has been in the business several years, he can usually count on the

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services of a good retainer; and as I have known many of these men, in many waters, it is a pleasure to say more than a word in their commendation. It is often true that a good boatman or gaffer is a character in his way. One of the best-read Shakespearean scholars I ever met was once my guide and boatman in the Adirondacks, before it was opened up to the world. In those days one had to ride on a buckboard thirty or forty miles to reach the heart of the mountains, and the deer and bear were not dazzled by electric lights and the vision of big hotels, motor cars, and men in dinner and evening dress on the shores of Blue Mountain Lake, nor were the trout in the chain of lakes familiar with the whirl of a propeller. I recall making the round of one of these lakes in one of the first launches placed upon the waters. We passed a little shack on a clearing by the lake side and the skipper said, "There's a man who would blow me out of the water if he dared; watch him," and pulling the whistle several times, out came the woodsman who ran down the beach shaking his fist at the little craft as long as she was in sight.

Bill Longley, as I will call him, not only had a *penchant* for Shakespeare, but he was a man of scholarly tastes and could have figured successfully in several professions in the outside world, but his poetic fancy led him to seek the deep woods and the solitudes where he was happy, which, after all, is the chief end of man. Bill was a clever fly caster;

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he knew every rock and hole where a large fish might lurk. He handled a boat as no one else could, and was at once the object of my regard and wonder, and of many who were fortunate in securing his services. I once dropped into camp with a well-known angler, a man of much erudition beyond the realm of tackle, and we found Bill scrubbing up the dishes. While sitting by the smudge watching him, my friend, the Professor, made use of a certain quotation from Sophocles, one with which not one in ten thousand persons, taken as they come, would be familiar. As he rolled it out, as certain gentlemen of the old school love to do, Bill stopped scrubbing his frying pan. "I'm glad to hear that, sir. I've been quoting that line wrong all my life."

"How did you quote it?" asked the Professor, who held a chair in ancient languages when he wasn't fishing.

"Why—" and Bill gave the quotation, and then as though carried away, kept on quoting line after line until he seemed to remember himself, stopped, and began to scrub again. Doubtless Bill had a history, but I never questioned him. He was one of the best guides and woodsmen in the Adirondacks thirty years ago, before the inundation from the cities; he lies deep in the heart of the great forest.

The boatmen along the St. Lawrence are a fine body of men, and one finds it difficult, indeed impossible, to make any comparisons. For a number of



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years Bill Massey rowed me with the late Andrew Clerk, the founder of the House of Abbey and Imbrey, the latter one of the most genial of black bass anglers. Massey made his headquarters at Westminster Park, opposite Alexandria Bay, and was a type of a dozen or more men who typified the best that can be imagined in guides or boatmen. Genial, possessed of a good nature that nothing could interfere with, honest as the day is long, holding a fine sense of honor, except when the size of his patron's fish was concerned, Massey was a manly fellow, the modern voyageur of the great river of the thousand islands and ten thousand delights.

He rowed me from ten to twenty-five miles a day, in and out. He knew every rock and shoal in the river, and often told me of the strike that I would have at a certain point; and it was marvelous to see his delicate adjustment of the fishing, dividing up the inside or shore side fishing so impartially between my companion and self that never a suspicion of unfairness was entertained. Massey never lost his head. I rather think he grew cooler in times of terrific excitement, and as for gallantry he was unsurpassed. One day when fishing with a fair angler we came upon a school of six or seven gigantic bass lying on the surface of the water at the foot of a high rocky bluff, and the skill with which Massey arranged it so that the lady cast first, and caught the most and the heaviest of the splendid record bass was a revelation.

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She took a three and one-half pounder, a four and one-half, and a five and one-half pounder in about forty minutes, the largest towing the boat around and around in its splendid play; and when they were in the boat this gaffing diplomat, who had never given me a chance to cast, congratulated *me* on my companion's skill, and so convinced me that I had really had a share in the honor, that we rowed a mile to the Canada shore that Bill might fittingly celebrate the famous catch, the record of that and many seasons, and incidentally weigh the fish.

While Massey was a perfect boatman his true genius was most apparent when he hauled the boat into some quiet cove, on Stave Island perhaps, and cooked a fish dinner of yellow perch, black bass, and on rare occasions a small muskellunge. Perhaps twenty anglers had agreed to meet here, and the boatmen were cooks and attendants about the tables that bore viands fit for the gods.

In Florida I had four boatmen for a number of years whose individuality is strikingly fixed upon my memory. The fishing ground was way out on the reef, and I found the men there when I arrived, on a key of about twelve acres of sand about a foot above high-water mark. Where they came from no one knew. One, I was told by an old reefer, was an ex-pirate, and he certainly looked it; the others were "various," and all were wreckers and fishermen, the bravest men I ever met. Ex-pirates, perhaps, but to

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me honest and true. It was a hard matter to get whiskey out on the reef at the time I write of, when I first met Long John, Bob Rand, Chief and Bunsby, their real names. One night when I went down to their quarters, I found them sitting around a long table playing "seven up," with a bottle of Perry Davis' Pain Killer between them. It was a pathetic sight. Long John was nearly seven feet in height, a giant in stature, and as thin as the traditional rail, his face the color of the wattles of a turkey. Bob Rand was very short and stout. Chief was a typical Seminole, while Bunsby was an old Scotch man-of-warsman in his adolescence, the possessor of a burr that was as good as a fog horn down the wind.

All these men were expert fishermen. Long John could toss the grains into a barracuda at longer range than any man I ever saw. Bob knew every coral head on the reef, and all were expert wreckers. John was loquacious. Bob so rarely spoke that I do not recall a dozen sentences, but this very attribute made him a solon, a monument of wisdom in the eyes of his fellows; he might well have been the original Jack Bunsby. All possessed absolute courage and coolness, and were men to be relied upon in trouble of any kind, or on a lee shore. I remember coming in one day with Long John from a fishing trip to one of the outer islands, when the wind suddenly died down to a sudden calm, and we were surrounded by several of the largest waterspouts I had ever seen, and

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I had lived some years in what might be termed a waterspout country. Before the wind dropped we had seen two large spouts ahead and supposed they were passing to the eastward, so kept on, headed for them, as they lay in our course; but they were more or less stationary for a while, and as we neared them three others began to drop from the peculiar low-lying clouds, the wind died as though it had been struck, and in a few moments we were literally surrounded by the great giants whose tops seemed lost in the heavens. A more terrifying spectacle it was never my fortune to witness. The roar was distinctly audible, and the entire heavens took on a strange copper hue, while the clouds grew dark and angry, and appeared to be supported by the gigantic pillars, apparently a mile high.

As the wind dropped the heavy boat stopped, and the giants seemed to close in upon us. I turned to Long John, who had the helm, and asked him if we could not pull ahead. He was absolutely unmoved by a sight that should have demoralized any man. The only thing he did was to ask me for a match, and lighting his old pipe he puffed away and waited for death, as it seemed impossible for us to escape. I remember wondering at his nonchalance, and tried to make up my mind what to do, whether to jump overboard when we were struck or stand by the boat. While I was turning it over in my mind Long John said he reckoned we were going to have some wind,

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and I saw that the spouts were bending to the east; then they began to move and the wind came rippling along the surface and caught the sails, but hardly enough to move the old hulk, and one of the spouts crossed our bow so near that I could have thrown a stone into it and the top seemed to be hovering directly over our heads down from which poured a sheet of rain. This spout passed quickly on with a roar like that of a locomotive, and with a fresh breeze the old sloop bore away. I have been telling the story to friends ever since, but I never could learn that Long John considered it even worthy of retailing to his comrades around the cheerful pain killer that night in the quarters.

Bob Rand, with whom I took my first lessons in taking the big barracuda with the grains, and who taught me the trick of pegging green turtles, was a man of equal indifference to danger, which must be sheer bravery. No sea was too heavy to keep him from a wreck, no chance so great that he would not take it to help a vessel into port in a hurricane. Once, while fishing for kingfish on the outer reef, trolling up and down a run of three or four miles, he and I were caught in as ugly a gale as I have ever encountered. The storms or squalls came up here with remarkable rapidity, and in twenty minutes a clear sky had become inky black and ominous and we barely had time to let fly the sheet and jerk out the sprit when it was upon us. For a moment I thought

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we would be blown out of the water, there seemed to be but one chance for us, and that to cross the reef, as it was impossible to beat around to the harbor entrance. So Bob pointed to the roaring wall of foam beyond which was our island and motioned me to take the flying sheet. I kicked off my shoes, following his example, then without a word he kept the boat away and headed her for what appeared to me to be a sure and positive catastrophe; but in the wall of dead coral over which the sea was thundering there was a channel called the "five-foot" from its supposed width, and if a boat on the outside got the lighthouse on a line with the second chimney in the quarters and could hold her there, he might make it in good weather, but it was almost impossible in a gale.

Bob had seen that it was our only chance and he took it without any hesitation. I took a turn about the cleat with the sheet, clung to the slack, and lay flat in the bottom of the boat bracing myself, and when he wore around and the gale caught the leg of mutton sail, the gaff having been carried away, it filled it with a report like a cannon, the craft careened violently, taking in a quantity of water, then like a bird shot along over the waves. In a few seconds we were in the back wash, then a huge roller caught us, and breaking as it went, half filling us, it sent the boat along like a shot into a mass of foam and spume that welled up over the boat and filled her from



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(1) A Good Catch of Yellowtail (G. Michalis, Boatman). (2) A Well Earned Prize (J. Gardiner, Gaffer). (3) A Leaping Tuna, Played Seven Hours by Mr. Wood and then Another Seven Hours by Harry Ellis, Boatman.





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rail to rail; yet upright, trembling like a living thing, she went speeding on the crest of the wave, until her very weight stopped her amid the wreckage of the big sea which swept over us, rolling us over into the sandy lagoon in three feet of water.

It has been my luck, good or bad, to land in heavy surf on various occasions where the outlook was ominous, but in all my experience I never met a man who had the peculiar quality of courage possessed by this silent boatman, the clever fisherman who gaffed many a big fish for me on the outer reef. Later I watched him with Long John go out through this channel in a half hurricane to a ship which was almost on the reef, which by their skill was brought in. I considered it a clear case of suicide, yet they boarded her by taking a rope from the spanker boom and were hauled aboard, losing their boat; yet the instance was not considered worthy of talking about. Men in any other region would have had medals from several humane societies.

Bob Rand, while as brave a man as ever lived, was a whimsical character in many ways, and ultimately went down before strong drink; the man that had taken a thousand chances to help his mates in gales on this lonely reef, was, in the succinct language of Bunsby, killed by "John Barleycorn," his wife, unfortunately being addicted to the same habit. When she died I went down with some sympathetic ladies to see what could be done, but Bob utterly

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destroyed the solemnity of the occasion when the visitors asked if there was anything in the barren shanty with which to garb the deceased, by producing from beneath the bed, a huge hoop skirt of the fashion of the sixties. He held it out with both hands and burst into tears, the first display of emotion I ever saw him make.

When I fell in with Robert Bunsby, another of this remarkable quartette, he was an old man with a decided list to port, due, he said, to rheumatism. When I last saw Bunsby he stood on the beach after a terrible hurricane, with wreckage piled high about him. Our sixty-ton schooner had gone to pieces the night before, and her timber strewed the sand, while our small racing and fishing boat was ground into such small pieces that in hours of search the old man could find but her name in copper letters which he held, while down his red and deep-lined cheeks genuine tears found their way. Wrecker, fisherman, boatman, genial good-natured Bunsby, as faithful companion as man ever had!

Many a night when he and I sat on the beach of some key watching for the big turtles to come in did he unfold some wonderful and impossible romance of his life, which he firmly believed. Though old and stiff, he insisted on being my companion on the various exciting sailing races we held, and here his one weakness came to the surface—he had all a sailor's horror of sharks, and was in constant fear of capsizing; in

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truth he was afraid of what he termed my reckless sailing, yet as we generally won in the end by means of this alleged recklessness, he was usually pacified. Once he gallantly rose above it. We were in a closely contested race and I was sailing my boat in half a gale without a reef. By mere good luck we had rounded the outer buoy ahead and I wore her around, and with great difficulty got her wing and wing. Bunsby lay flat on his back, tending the sheet of the big fore sail. I had the helm and the main sheet, and Paublo, a negro, bailed with a bucket as the boat was a third full all the time. She squared away and flew along and as we passed the boats we had distanced, Bunsby could not resist and raised up and waved his hat and held out the end of the sheet. At that moment a big sea broke astern and rolled in upon us filling the boat, but, curiously enough, did not capsize her, so that she stood on the surface, but almost stationary. Bunsby's face emerged from the water, and struggling to a sitting position like a half-drowned rat, he turned to me and shouted, "Hold her to it, sir! hold her to it. We'll beat the d— fleet if we are full." We slacked away the sheets and Paublo and I got overboard to lighten her, while Bunsby, not being easy on the shark question, bailed her out; and even then we did not come in last. It should be mentioned that the buoyancy of this boat was due to a row of airtight cans on each side, and a forward deck holding a bigger can, found useful on many occasions, as when

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the boat filled it was only necessary to keep still and bail her out.

Bunsby of all the boatmen here was the only one afraid of sharks. I have seen men swimming under the keel of a vessel to examine the copper when ten-foot sharks were not many feet away, and could be caught at any time, while others often plunged from the dock as big sharks were passing in full view, to prove their timidity. Chief claimed that with a knife he would tackle any shark, and doubtless he could, and with success, for a more clever man in the water, or about it, would be difficult to imagine.

As this paper refers particularly to the pluck and bravery of boatmen, as a class, I must include an incident relating to a boatman named Rogers, who frequently went with me on fishing trips, and was our chef.

In one of the devastating West Indian hurricanes which swept over this region, a tall building next to our own quarters was blown over, leaving a dangerous wall standing. It was necessary to attach a rope to the top to haul it over, but it was so evidently dangerous that the overseer would not order any of the men to attempt it. While he was discussing it Rogers volunteered; his sailor life stood him well in hand, and as he climbed up the trembling pile the crowd hardly dared to breathe lest they should demoralize him. Up he went, sixty or one hundred feet, and with consummate skill hauled up a cable

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and fastened it, then made his way down, to be received with the loudest cheer that ever broke the echoes of the key. The act was one of such signal bravery that the government recognized it in a liberal way to Charles Rogers, boatman.

The idea of fear never entered his sturdy breast. One day when we were shark fishing a large shark jerked him overboard in the lagoon in water shoulder deep. The average man would have dropped the line, but not Rogers. He held on and went down out of sight, coming up a few feet distant, and was towed away so rapidly on the surface that I could only catch him by sculling and intercepting the fish in one of its zig-zag rushes. It may be said that there was no particular danger in this, but there was a school of sharks, ten or twelve feet in length, and they were darting here and there, all about him, and while the danger was not apparent to us, the situation would have deterred many a man.

It is a long reach either on the wind or before it from Loggerhead Key to Boon Island light, off the Maine coast, but a boatman I often had in these waters when hunting for the tuna or horse mackerel, or other game well offshore, was a type of the sturdy fishermen who have given a distinctive character to New England along shore. This boatman, whose only claim was that he was a cod fisherman, went out every day from six to ten miles offshore, fishing; on land he was a school trustee, a selectman and a citi-

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zen of much intelligence. I heard the most remarkable story about him from an old friend, himself a character along the coast, Captain Sam Littlefield, who made many voyages to the river Platte. "One year," said Captain Sam, whose inimitable Yankee dialect it would be impossible to reproduce, "I was running a schooner from Boston up the coast, and one day, when about five miles off the Isles of Shoals, I heard a hail, 'Schooner ahoy!' I was regularly struck dumb, as there wasn't a sail nearer than five miles. I called the boy and asked him if he heard anything, when it came again, 'Ship ahoy!' and this time my name, 'Sam,' jest as plain as could be. I stood there in a regular sog for a minute, and I reckon that boy was nigh scared to death. I looked all around, and there, about one hundred feet to windward, I see a head as it rose on a sea. I luffed a mite, an' in a minute I see it was Daniel P——. 'Ahoy, shipmate!' he sung out, as cheery as if I'd met him a-walkin' down the street. 'Ahoy!' says I, givin' her a push up into the wind; 'won't ye come aboard,' says I, 'or,' says I, 'are you goin' the other way?' 'Wal,' says Daniel, now alongside, 'I was a-goin' right ashore, but seein' as you've come along I'll join you,' and with that he caught the line I tossed him and in a moment he climmed aboard as fresh as a daisy.

"This," said Captain Sam, "was ten miles offshore, and he'd swum about five miles and would

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have fetched it sure some time if it was ten miles. The way it happened was this. He and a boy and a cat was the crew of a coal schooner, and a sudden squall struck him afore he could cast off the gaff topsail sheets, and over she went and down she went, takin' the boy and the cat so sudden they couldn't get out and afore Daniel knew where he was, he was in the water, and with his ile skins on; but he got the whole rig off in the water, cast 'em off, and started to swim in shore, a matter of ten miles. He was nearer the Isles of Shoals or Boon Island, but he knew he couldn't make anything so small on account of the tide, so he just headed for sundown and swum on, and as luck would have it, ran afoul me, and I'll tell you what, don't ever tell this yarn, as they'll put you down as a tarnation liar, to put it mild; but its a fact."

This was the true story of as brave and modest a man as ever pulled an oar or gaffed a fish, and I finally one day when we were fishing offshore, induced him to relate it. He did not consider it out of the ordinary, as he could swim all day and all night, and he thought he could have made shore, but he saw Captain Sam's schooner and luckily headed her off. On my last day's fishing with Daniel I sat amidships holding a trolling line as we ran in, watching him holding the tiller in hand, steering by intuition, as he was fast asleep. The great Gulf of Maine where it begins to turn to the east is his grave; the endless

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murmur of the sea his requiem. He went out one day, so his wife wrote me, bore offshore as the sun rose, sailed on into the unknown sea where the winds are ever fair, and I fancied as I went over our many conversations on the outer bank that this true heart would rest better deep in the blue waters he knew so well than buried in the rocky pastures along shore.

"Captain Sam" was often skipper or boatman on my fishing trips in this region, as rich and genial a character as the fertile land ever produced. He told me that his first trip to sea was on an old hog-back schooner that had a hump like a camel. He had a load of something for the Bay of Fundy and sailed up this long reach in blissful ignorance of the famous tides. He was awakened at his anchorage by the grunting of pigs which were rooting about the rudder post.

"When I went on deck," said Captain Sam, "she had an awful list on her, and I'll swan there wasn't a drop of water in sight. It was the most powerful parch I ever heard on and I was in a sog for a while."

Along the tarpon grounds of the mainland of Florida are many excellent boatmen lying about the central points for anglers, and at Aransas Pass, on the Texas shore, are a dozen or more men, among the most skillful of their class. These men have for boats some skiffs that no tuna fisherman would dare think of going out in, hence skill and intelligence is an absolute necessity. It was my fortune to employ



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one Mateo Brugen, a clever oarsman and gaffer, with a wholesome respect for the big sharks of the Pass that did him credit. The angler appreciates bravery and pluck in a boatman, but not recklessness, and the boatman who takes many and useless chances at the expense of his patron's comfort is the man to avoid. I was struck with the intelligence and caution of Mateo, and found that he was a type of all the watermen there, a faithful jolly lot of men, any one of whom would add to the pleasure of a day's fishing. Mateo was an Austrian, who had followed the sea all his life and could splice the main brace on a three-master in a gale, or for the toothache, it was just as you took him; and when I say that he had me fast to as lively a tarpon as ever bent a twenty-ounce rod, ten minutes after I reached the ground, and repeated the act almost every time I went out, it may be surmised that he was a boatman after the angler's heart.

The way he managed his light skiff was a pleasure to see. In coming in one afternoon the sea suddenly picked up in the channel; he rowed in on the lee side of the jetty, and when we reached the end, we had to go out into the channel, but to reach the latter it was necessary to cross a shoal over which I saw that some high rollers were breaking. It was a question of this, or the surf on the beach opposite our island, and I wondered what he would do. He did not hesitate but pulled onto the shoal, and I con-

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fess that I took a turn about the seat with my line, so that my valuable reel would stay by the boat, and prepared to kick off my canvas shoes for a swim, but the first sea that came menacing in he whirled the skiff about and we went over it like a bird. I have been spilled out of a dory by a smaller sea. Then, instead of pulling off again, he pulled diagonally out and after riding several big seas, made the channel in a manner so skillful that I never again thought of capsizing when with him.

The California boatmen and gaffers are well in line, so far as ability is concerned, with their Eastern representatives, and there is, especially in Northern California, more of a foreign sprinkling. Along the St. Lawrence many of the men are part French, or have French ancestors of the old voyageur's type, while in California we find among the fishermen many Venetians, Italians, and Portuguese. But the actual gaffers and boatmen to anglers are in Southern California, are in the main Americans, and men of skill, intelligence and pluck. Harry Elms was a boatman to Mr. John Woods, of Los Angeles, when he played a tuna seven hours; then the angler gave out and Elms took the rod and it was supposed that a fresh man could bring the fish to gaff at once, but it is the unexpected which happens. Elms worked, single-handed and alone, for nearly seven hours to save his patron's tuna. It was necessary for the angler to go in and he was taken off, Elms refusing to give up

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the contest; so his gaff was placed near him, and he was left seven or eight miles off Santa Catalina. During the seven hours he was towed a number of miles out to sea, at times having the fish near the surface, again losing it. It was so large that he could not bring it in, and at the end of the fourteen hours' battle he succeeded in raising it so that the huge tail was plainly visible, the leader being wound about it. It was manifestly impossible for him to gaff the fish, so a man from another boat made the attempt. When the great fish felt the gaff it made a desperate plunge and escaped, after the greatest struggle ever chronicled in the annals of tuna angling.

The moral is, that the boatman has the interests of his patron completely at heart. In this instance skill and dogged determination to win were the characteristics, and the boatman here is not only a thorough sailor, angler, and fisherman, but he is familiar with all the conditions about the islands and is frequently consulted by the government regarding the banks about Santa Catalina. Another such a man at Santa Catalina is Mexican Joe, the dean of this interesting family of Avalon boatmen, the oldest citizen of Santa Catalina, and one of the most interesting and genial characters on this isle of summer; not only a good boatman and gaffer, but the possessor of a wealth of fishing lore. No one knows the islands as well as Joe, and as guide over the green hills and mountains in winter he is pre-eminent and

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undisputed. Long before the day of launches, when he was the only boatman and guide of the island, I fished with him, and he thought nothing of rowing fifteen miles up the coast and back for a day's yellow-tail fishing. To-day this is counted a day's trip for a power launch. I know that Joe's nerve is true for I have fished with him under all conditions, but he pleased me best one day when he put me through what I called a bad surf at San Clemente. I was perfectly willing to swim and really expected to, not believing that a boat could live in the breakers with the heavy and rather nervous load we had, but Joe stopped and addressed his audience:

"Gentlemen, if you will just sit still and give me a show, I'll land you and you won't get your feet wet."

So we sat while Joe bided his time, as would a thoroughly sensible, careful and reliable boatman who knew all about surf riding, and when the series of low waves came he went in and landed us, dry-footed.

Among the characters of the islands there was one well known to those fond of leaping-shark fishing—Johnny Daly, a clever gaffer, with a good nature that had no limitations and a brogue that would have arrested the attention of Ned Kendall's ghost. According to legend, sometime in the past Johnny laid in a barrel of Kentucky Blue Grass whiskey; the barrel still remains and is mounted on a cart that resem-

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bles a gun carriage of the time of Paul Jones. Harnessed to this was an old white horse, said to have belonged sometime in the past to a noted bandit. The first time I saw this team Johnny came down the cañon road sitting on the barrel—an outfit so remarkable and original that I can think of him in no other connection.

Among the Avalon fishermen is Vincente Moriche, a Venetian who employs a number of others, skilled men, while Percy Neal, a clever gaffer, boatman and guide, and many more are all men who know every foot of these islands and every fishing-ground along its shores. On the Fourth of July these men display their brawn by having a tug-of-war with five boats on a side, ranged along the shore, where several thousand people cheer and encourage them.

Almost every locality where angling is the vogue, from San Diego to Avalon, to Monterey where salmon are caught on the Pacific coast, and from the Restigouche to Texas on the Gulf, boatmen are found who, by their knowledge of the best localities, make sport what it is to the weary business man who steals away to the sea or the woodland solitudes for a few weeks in summer.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DUEL

**A** HEAVY ground swell was piling in from the west, lifting the glazed turquoise sea in mysterious ridges and furrows, gigantic pulse beats beginning in no-man's land somewhere to the west and ending in sheets of foamy spume that leaped up the steep slopes of the precipitous Santa Catalina cliffs, which, painted in red, blue, mauve, yellow, green and vermilion, cast strange and indescribable reflections upon the restless waters.

A great mass of pinnacled rock bearing a vague figure of a lion couchant, guarded this region to the south, and around it beneath the water grew the marine forest of *Nereocystis* that waved and bent in strange serpentine convolutions with the erratic ebbing and flowing of the tide.

Out beyond the outer kelp bed one might have seen on the crest of a swell the long slender figure of a

NOTE.—The habits of the swordfish are but little known. It is an oceanic roamer and as yet but one breeding ground where the young are found is known, the Mediterranean. This is a chapter from the history of a swordfish, the incidents being taken from actual happenings which the author has either observed, or has obtained from acquaintances who did see them; hence so far as it goes the history may be relied upon as authentic, though made up from the life histories of several individuals.

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fish that stood out, a marine bas-relief, against the azure background and then as suddenly disappeared as the wave came on, leaving it in the valley beyond to again appear as another ground swell came sweeping in with its messages from the outer sea.

Big fishes are so common here that this might well have been passed by, but it was different from the ordinary passer; it was long and slim, yet robust, and from its head extended a poniard-like object of dun color. As the wave turned, or threw it up, the lower surface of the fish was seen to be white, the upper a delicate mauve or French gray. It was directly on the surface, ten or twelve feet long, and cutting the water like a knife was a slender dorsal fin—an expressive organ to the looker on, and followed by the upper lobe of the powerful crescent-like tail.

The swordfish was an ocean wanderer. Men had named him *Xiphias* years ago. He did not know it, but he knew men and their boats, as he had more than once tried conclusions with them. He was born on the high seas, at first a strange little creature with equal jaws or bills, enormous eyes, like an infant Ichthyosaurus, bearing little or no resemblance to its parent, and from stage to stage it had passed, like some strange insect, only gradually assuming the typical shape, form and figure of the adult swordsman of the sea.

At times, and in winter, it took to the open waters

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of the ocean, haunting the deep rocky ledges or submarine plateaus, where vast shoals of mackerel and small fry lived, in constant terror, fleeing from it as from a devouring monster. Its method of life was one of rapine, murder and sudden death; the mere catching of prey did not satisfy it, the sight of blood seemed to fire its sodden brain with a lust for prey, and sighting a school of mackerel it fired up like some living engine, dashed ahead like a torpedo, and with fierce strikes right and left mowed them down, and amid the silvery shower again and again rushed into the solid animated mass, killing for the mere insatiate love of it, then circled gracefully around and picked up the disembodied pieces.

This occurred several times a day; now on the surface where every movement was visible, again in deeper water where the sunlight came dimly down in great bands and was intercepted by myriads of delicate jelly-like forms that floated in it. The great swordfish had few enemies, except sharks that followed in the wake of schools of barracuda, tuna and other schooling fishes, and to them it paid no attention and they doubtless gave it ample sea room, or a single thrust from this living battering ram, and the end of another shark came and the beginning of a cannibalistic feast.

The swordfish had been working its way up the coast and inshore, following a large school of silvery smelt that were tid-bits to its choice, and as large as



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mackerel. As it swam slowly along it presented a picture of strength and reserve force; clinging to it were four or five black, flat-headed remoras, towed along by their protector, while several swam about hunting for food. Suddenly the swordfish perceived a large flying-fish acting strangely, whirling slowly around yet moving along. Few if any game fish can resist the spectacle of wounded small fry, and the swordfish was no exception. A quick movement of the powerful tail and the game was seized; then the big fish for the first time felt pain, something sharp, venomous, irritating, struck it sharply in the mouth. A strange bearing, controlling sensation followed. The fish had possibly felt the strong resistance when its sword was hilt deep in the thick blubber of a whale, but this was a new terror-inspiring sensation, and wild, maddened at the unknown check, it surged upward like a living catapult and went shimmering, trembling, high into the air.

Of all leapers the swordfish is the most clumsy, the most ungraceful, rising up and forward at an angle of forty-five degrees, then dropping flat or prone upon the surface with a tumultuous splash and roar of waters. In the few seconds in the air the swordsman of the sea may have caught a glimpse of the big mountains of Santa Catalina lying like a giant whale on the surface, and just ahead, a launch and a man holding a rod. It is very doubtful if the fish associated this object sixty or seventy feet distant with the

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cause of its pain, though possibly its big black eyes took in all foreign objects in sight. Had the fish been able to grasp the situation it would have seen an angler standing, rod in hand, staring with amazement at the leap, and a boatman, a long, iron-tipped gaff in hand, gazing over his shoulder, equally astonished and perhaps perturbed, as this was the first time in the history of a great fishing ground, that is visited every year by thousands of people, that a swordfish had been hooked by an angler with rod and reel.

The swordfish was not disturbed by reflections of any kind. Of an uncertain and vicious temper it was annoyed, then maddened by being held by something it could not see, and dropping into the water it dashed away in blind fear and fury, still feeling the strange, uncanny check which seemed to follow it as a sheet of foam. Cutting the water one hundred, two hundred feet, it shot ahead with the speed of light, then still held, still in the toils, it again sprang into the air with frenzied shake and twist, whirling itself from side to side, striking terrific blows in search of the invisible enemy. Falling, the swordfish plunged downward, sounded, and reached two hundred feet below the surface and the bottom, then turned, and rose with a mighty rush, going high into the air again, whirling itself completely over in its madness, so that it fell upon its back, beating the sea into a maelstrom of foam and spume, in its blind and savage fury. Again it leaped into the air, and still again, and

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whether it saw the cause of its trouble and realized it, or whether it was merely an accident cannot be said, but the facts remain that it charged in the direction of the launch, shot along the surface, dorsal fin out of water, like a knife, tossing spray, an animated fury, the embodiment of blind savage rage. What would have been the result no one can say, but the quick eye of the boatman saw the move, pushed his lever just in time, and the living sword shot by the stern, not two feet from it, and in a few seconds was taking line from the big reel in the opposite direction.

Up to this moment the angler had not been able to stop the fish and it had taken four hundred or more feet of line, when it charged. Could he take in the slack? The fish caught him unawares, and went twisting up into the air again, flinging itself about in a frenzy of rage or fear, then disappeared. That the swordfish was about to ram the boat was, to the excited angler, a moral certainty, and there was but one result of such a charge. Such a fish had been known to sink a sixty-ton schooner, and seriously damage a full-rigged ship, and, sad to relate, the timid angler lost his nerve when it was most required, and when the opportunity presented itself for an interesting experiment, he shouted to the boatman to go inshore, pointed his rod at the fish, and when the thread-like line came taut, jerked it, and parted company with what was, in all probability, a splendid game fish, a half dozen or more finished catches since, justi-

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fyng this assumption. Doubtless to land such game one runs a possible risk of being charged or rammed by the game, but I believe it to be very slight.

The big swordfish, still feeling the broken line dragging over its perfectly smooth back, rushed madly about, gradually quieting down and taking up a swinging gait to the north. It had reached the deeper waters where a deep channel or fiord cuts into the island, when, without warning, a blue-backed, torpedo-like body shot out of the depths, coming at it like an arrow. The swordfish tipped down and a sword grazed its head as a big thick-set member of its own family, a trim but heavy fish with a sword but half the length of its own, swept through the water above it. The two fishes turned and came at each other like mad bulls, tossing spray into the air with their knife-like dorsals, in so deadly a fashion that a spectator\* stopped rowing, backed off to a presumably safe distance, then stood up in his boat and watched the demoniac struggle for the mastery by these two well matched swordsmen of the sea. Again by some miracle they missed, just grazing one another and so shooting on into the blue of the ocean, to whirl about and begin the circling play for time and opportunity. They turned about each other possibly three or four times, then like battering rams came together with a strange whistling sound and an impact that tossed the

\* This duel was observed by Harry Elms, of Avalon, and the author examined the skull of one of the fishes later.

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white churned spume high in air, came together as only bodies weighing two hundred or three hundred pounds can, when impelled by animate vibrant engines of unknown power; came together and remained there, whirling, tossing, tail in air, rolling over and over, twisting, writhing, bending like blades of steel, waving, fanning the spray-filled air until the myriad-hued ocean whose every move caught the splendid tints of the cliffs, looked like the center of some strange volcanic disturbance, in which flashed the fins and dim forms of Turner's masterpiece—the slave ship. The sole and silent looker-on perceived that the long slender fish had pierced the other; the sword had entered the cheek near the eye, coming out near the gills, and the terrific efforts on the part of the fish, its bounds and twisting to unsheath the sword, was accomplished only after a struggle of several minutes.

The larger swordfish, wounded to the quick, was in no sense discouraged, and as it wrenched itself away, it dragged the other over and, turning like a flash, struck it from the side a lateral blow. Both fishes now shot away and began the circling, playing for time and opportunity, then again came together, partly leaping out of the water, separating, giving mighty side blows, and then out of the red-stained water one broke and fled, the other following to repeat the struggle, charging some distance off, then disappeared. I discovered the largest of these fishes a few days later on the sand, where it had been

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washed or thrown by the waves. Four or five deep wounds penetrated the body. In one rush the sword had entered the eye, coming out at the gills; another cut a furrow along the top of the head; another still had entered from below; but the real cause of defeat, the reason why the splendidly-equipped despoiler had shown the white flag, was evident—its sword was splintered and broken against its enemy. Helpless, it had been struck, *carte and tierce*, rammed repeatedly, and left for dead by the other, which, doubtless, was desperately wounded and with difficulty escaped from the large sharks which lurked in the vicinity. The dead swordfish was about nine feet in length when its sword was complete, its barrel-shaped body powerful, hard, and muscular, its mackerel-like tail suggestive of a dominant force—a swordsman well calculated to demoralize an enemy of any kind.

Fishes soon recover from their wounds, even of the most desperate character, and doubtless the winner in this duel, surly, ugly, constantly on the alert, swam slowly on keeping inshore for a few days, until, its wounds represented by scars, it again turned into the open sea.

For days it met no prey. It swam along the surface, sometimes chased by sharks, then leaping clumsily into the air, and one day perceiving a dense black mass ahead and possibly remembering its late encounter, it dashed forward, taking the initiative, and plunged its long keen rapier into the soft yielding

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blubber of a whale, which sprang into the air, dragging its tormentor, which swung loose, to circle and ram the leviathan again and again, until weary of so fruitless a prey it turned, dodged the mighty blows of the whale's tail and swam away.

The swordfish now traveled over water a mile deep, filled with mystic shapes, crystals of the sea, shaped in radiant models, richly tinted in lavender, pink, brown, blue and amber. Some were in chains, as Salpæ, ten, twenty, thirty or more feet in length—undulating serpents on the surface of the sea. At night the swordfish traveled through a region of vivid lights—red, blue, yellow, green, silver and gold—which gleamed, scintillated and blazed on every hand. Its long rapier was a blaze of light and the entire outline of the swordfish was framed in lines of vivid fire—the votive offerings of the lamps of the sea, while during the day countless forms of minute animals filled the waters with marvelous gleams, as though myriads of gems of all kinds had been scattered over the sea, by some Midas hand; gems whose light was iridescent, not phosphorescent. So, slowly traveling, hunting for schools of sardines or mackerel, the swordsman fell in with several of its kind and together they cruised off shore. One day as it swam along another whale appeared, but lighter, like a sulphur bottom. The swordfish saw it indistinctly, and standing not on the order of going, scorning the huge leviathan, shot ahead like a bullet from a gun, struck the dim object a blow that

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shook it in every fiber and muscle. But the whale did not leap or shrink; it moved stolidly on, and the swordsman found himself being towed, hard and fast, unable to move, held by the unknown. No soft blubber this; no jellyfish to cut down with a single sweep, but some terrible mechanical force that swept on and on, eternally on. The swordfish was partly stunned by the shock, but quickly recovered and whirled its body about back and forth, up and down in frantic endeavor to escape; then something gave way, a wrenching, tearing, deadly shock, and it swam away, out of balance, impotent, the most timid and helpless thing in all that great sea, a swordfish without a sword; its weapon had broken short off.\*

A few months later the ship *Fortune* made port, and on the log was seen by the curious that on the 14th of June, while under full sail and off bottom, the ship suddenly received a shock from an unknown cause. When the ship was docked and unloaded, a long and powerful sword was found penetrating her side. It had passed through the copper, through six inches of oak, through a foot of soft wood and several partitions, the tip entering a barrel of oil, not a drop of which escaped. The case attracted widespread attention, and the sword was cut out and placed with the section of timber in a museum, where it stands an effective monument for this swashbuckler of the sea, that soon paid the penalty of its disposition

\* From the Smithsonian records made by Prof. G. Brown Goode.



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and either starved to death or became the prey of predatory sharks.

It is an interesting question to decide whether a hooked swordfish is really trying to ram a boat when it makes its sensational and menacing rushes on the line. Anglers who have cut away from such fish in Santa Catalina waters are confident that they are; and the number of small boats which have been struck by the ordinary Eastern swordfish suggests that they are a dangerous game, while the following incident, reported by the *Havana Post*, points to the conclusion that the tall-finned Cuban species at least, is game to be handled with care. The *Post* states that at the time of writing one Eugenio Martinez, of Casa Blanca, a fisherman, "lies in the hospital at the town of Cajimae for treatment from a wound received from a swordfish. He was about three miles off the Morro when he had a strike and hooked the swordfish, which towed the boat repeatedly for some time, then suddenly stopped, turned, rushed at the boat and jumped through the air, striking Martinez in the leg and piercing it. The rush of the fish threw Martinez overboard, but he never lost control of himself and managed to again get on board."

The most valuable swordfish fishing in the world is that found in the vicinity of Block Island, Massachusetts, where the huge *Xiphias* is followed by swordfishermen rigged for the purpose with a "pulpit" on the bow. The fishermen pack the fish in salt

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until they obtain a load, then bear away for Boston, where I have seen a dozen vessels unloading at the same time, the men hoisting out the big bodies, the heads and swords having been left behind. It is a singular fact that these New England fishes cannot be taken with hook and line, while the sailfish of Florida and Cuba, and the powerful short marlin-spike swordfish of Southern California takes the bait readily and are included among the game fishes of the several regions, making a desperate fight on the rod, and having a decided economic value. Usually swordfishes on the California coast appear singly, but several years ago an enormous school was seen in the San Clemente Channel moving slowly north—an imposing and menacing spectacle.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ADVENTURES WITH THE BIGGEST BASS

**W**HEN the angling habitué of the Pacific coast of Southern California speaks of fishing grounds he has in mind conditions entirely different from those in the East. Here the smart catboat is bounding along over the water in a fresh wind, trolling perhaps for bluefish, or the angler is anchored, as I have often been, ten miles off the Maine coast, in a dory, holding on hard in the heavy sea which is often present; but on the Southern California coast, the angler goes to the string of islands offshore and in deep water, in calms like that which rests on the surface of the Rangeley Lakes or the Adirondacks, fishes for the big game that is on the surface and ready for the lure. Good winds, stiff seas, can be had if desired; but the big island of Santa Catalina is sixty miles around, and on its northeast side affords miles of lee where the water is almost always smooth.

This is to some extent essential for the kind of sport found on the Pacific Slope, where the fish are big and hard fighters. Some comparison may be

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made. In the East, a ten-pound weakfish is a large fish. It is found on the Pacific Slope up to eighty pounds, though a different species, and averages fifty pounds at Catalina and Monterey Bay, affording famous sport. The bluefish is represented by a cousin, the yellowtail, which runs up to sixty pounds, averaging twenty-five pounds. The blackfish of the East, a common catch as tautog, runs occasionally to ten pounds or more, and the fish of the nearest habit on the Pacific Coast is the great black sea bass, though not a near ally.

My first glimpse of this great fish was at Santa Catalina. I was fishing for small game and was hauling in a whitefish when I observed a monster fish following my catch. I hauled the faster and drew my whitefish literally out of the frying pan into the fire, as the big fish, over six feet long and doubtless weighing three hundred pounds, shot to the surface, making the water boil not two feet from my face, darting away with the speed of a sardine as it saw me.

It was a vision to make the blood run, and I soon interviewed the only boatman on the island, as this was twenty years ago, before Santa Catalina had really been discovered as an angling paradise, and Joe told me that it was a jewfish. I had caught a three-hundred-pound jewfish in the Gulf of Mexico; a miserable sulker, an overgrown creature, and knew that a real jewfish, that is, of the Florida type, could



**Mammoth Sea Bass Caught at Santa Catalina Islands with Rod and Reel.**



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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not by any stretch of the imagination be supposed to rush up to the surface in deep water like a bass, and I soon found that the jewfish of California was an entirely different fish. The Florida fish looks like a giant overgrown grouper, a fellow who will lie in a mud hole and engulf everything that comes along. On the other hand, the California giant is a fish, called *Stereolepis gigas*, of the bass type, never living in holes or on the bottom, but lurking in the halls and nooks of the great forest of *Nereocystis* which surrounds the California islands, floating gardens of the sea, whose beauties compare with those of the land.

“ Mexican Joe,” who was in those days the *arbiter piscatorium*, the oldest inhabitant, and the best-posted man on the island, smiled when I suggested that the big fish could be taken with a rod. But Joe no longer smiles, as he has seen hundreds of them taken in this sportsmanlike way, and his jewfish is now the black sea bass of fame and sport. Joe had taken many of them with a hand-line, and one day with a party of friends he rowed us to Pebble Beach, where we anchored over a mysterious rock, supposed to be haunted by bass, and not one hundred feet from the shining sands five of us served to amuse a big sea bass. Joe baited the big cod-line with a live white-fish, and, as the originator of the expedition, I was awarded the honor of the first trial.

It was a charming place in which to test one's

## *Big Game at Sea*

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patience. Lofty rocks, mountains climbing up into the clouds, deep cañons winding away filled with sweet-scented verdure; picturesque rocks rising like castles, and in the water, deep waving forests of kelp, the hanging gardens of the sea. All about the water was so clear, so perfectly smooth, that it seemed to be a disk of steel reaching away to the edge of the world, and sea and sky blending so perfectly that, were it not for the caps of high mountains eleven thousand or twelve thousand feet in the air in the distant Sierra Madre, one could not have told where earth began and sky ended. We sat perhaps twenty minutes, waiting, then I felt something nibbling on the line, the very antipodes of what might have been expected from the huge fish. In fact, having fished the Mexican Gulf for tarpon where a thousand animals prey upon bait, I might have fancied the inevitable crab was nibbling on the lure. But Joe shook his head, touched the line, and whispered hoarsely and dramatically, "jewfish, sure," and at that exact moment the line began to stiffen and to run slowly out.

"Let him have ten feet," said our boatman.

Have you ever tried to count one, two, three as a big shark was slowly running off with your line? Your heart is bounding away ahead of your counting; in a word, it is a nerve-wracking period, as there is a subtle something which comes up the line, which thrills you, and sets the nerves tingling, and then the ten feet have been eaten up by this mysterious thing



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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beneath the sea. You check it; the line comes taut, and for a single second you feel that strange insistent throbbing and think you hear it, as the line is a single chord played by the currents of the sea. Then you brace back and, as the line tautens, jerk heavily on the line and then, literally, the deluge.

At this period I had taken every known large fish in our Southern waters, not once, but repeatedly, from the tarpon to the king of rays, but in all these bouts I had never received so quick a retort, as the next thing I knew my arms were elbow deep in the water and the line was hissing through the water. It is the fashion to disparage the hand-line and argue that it requires no skill and is a barbarous method of taking a really game fish, for the latter, as a rule, has no chance whatever; yet contrast the action of a green hand and a skilled handliner; the former misses, his line becomes involved, while the latter hauls in with the rapidity of light, his fingers grip the line every time by intuition, and when the rush comes, he allows it to run out, using his thumb and forefinger as a brake, and putting on just the required tension.

There was not much time to make a demonstration of skill here, as the hauling was all one way. I could compare it to nothing but a twelve-foot shark, too big to be fooled with, yet I did manage to stop it legitimately and hauled it up a foot or two, then I had my arms dragged beneath the surface again.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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There were five anglers on the waiting list eager for the fray, so to be fair I handed the line to the Doctor, who promptly was jerked down, his arms beneath the water. About two minutes satisfied him, and he passed the line along to the banker, who performed duty heroically; then the Judge took his turn. All the while Joe lay back and enjoyed the agonies of the anglers unused in the main to such a "beastie."

I do not recall who had the honor of landing this bass, but I am confident that it gave sport and anguish to at least five men. I had always supposed that this fish weighed three hundred and forty-seven pounds and had so entered it in my angling diary, about like this:

"June 30, caught one jewfish; weight, three hundred forty-seven pounds; length, six feet seven inches" (with no mention of the rest of the angling syndicate). I found later, not only did the rest do the same, but some claimed to have caught the fish single-handed. Years after it happened I recalled the catch to a member of the party and the weight, three hundred forty-seven pounds.

"You are wrong about the weight of that fish," he said; "it was five hundred pounds." Which shows that my memory is treacherous; it *was* five hundred pounds, and its length must have been eight or more feet. To this day I hardly see how I could have landed, single-handed, so gigantic a fish. Mexican Joe still lives, and the catch was made over

## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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twenty years ago, but I doubt if he would remember this adventure in any other way than that. The bass was caught by himself.

In the intervening years I took a number of jewfish and several honestly and fairly, single handed; and this has been accomplished by scores of anglers. Perhaps the most interesting catch was made by Senator Charles Bell of Pasadena. He always fished in a light canoe-like boat and would capture his gigantic game, bring it to gaff, and tow it in in triumph single handed. As time went on the Tuna Club was organized for the establishment of a higher standard of sport and the protection of the game fishes of the coast, and prizes were offered for the man who would take the big bass with a rod, and to-day three or four are often taken in this way in a day in summer from June to September.

Among the many catches I have made, one will perhaps illustrate the strength and endurance of the fish, as I happened to know the weight of the boat, a small impossible skiff weighing one hundred and twenty-five pounds. An acquaintance who had never caught a black sea bass, and who was trying to reduce his weight by rowing, insisted upon acting as boatman and pulled to the grounds, about six or seven miles. Ten o'clock found us anchored in the kelp one hundred feet offshore. This, too, being before the fish had been taken with a rod, though I had often tried it, but never succeeded, the fish breaking my too

## *Big Game at Sea*

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delicate tips. We happened to strike a lucky day, and while watching for the big game to bite, fished for sheepshead.

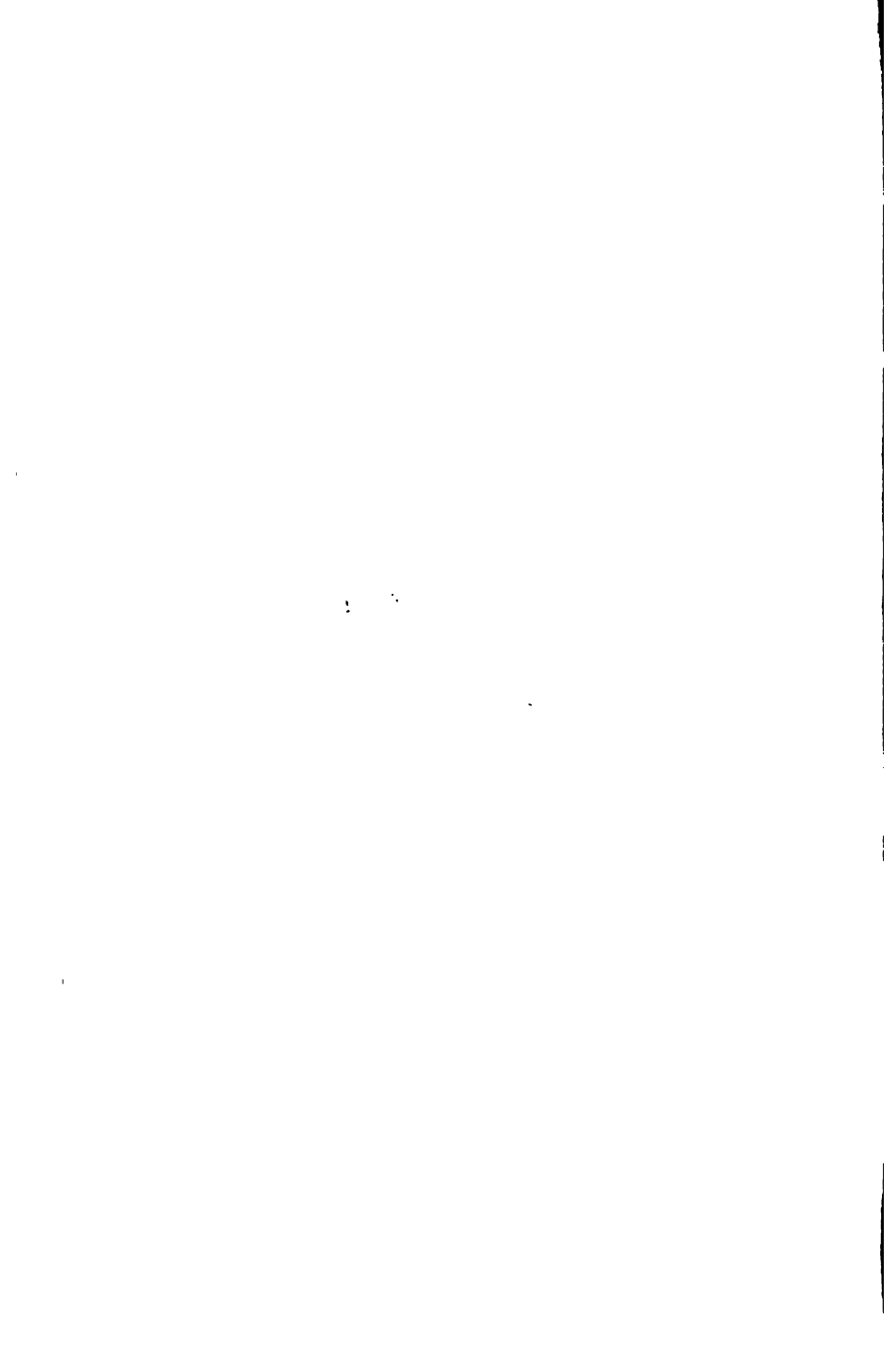
We had landed ten or twelve, and two large sharks, all of which my companion insisted upon keeping with the enthusiasm of the new angler, hence the boat was well filled when the strike came. My companion weighed over two hundred pounds, and as I hooked the big fish he lay, or sat down in the bow to prevent the fish from hauling the flat stern of the skiff entirely under.

I held on hard during several rushes of the bass to give my companion a good idea of the power of the fish, which nearly dragged the skiff under; in fact, my slacking alone saved us, and several times I held on until he cried "Enough!" I had made the boat fast to the floating kelp and at the strike tossed the big vine overboard; away we went in the wake of the fish, which weighed anywhere from two hundred to four hundred pounds. It took us possibly a quarter of a mile offshore before I could stop it. I repeatedly hauled it in after the fashion of shark fishing, pulling rapidly and then letting go, then repeating it—a process which, if enough line is at hand, is very fatal to large fish, especially when kept up.

Time and again this bass took me down elbow deep into the blue water, and realizing that my companion was having enough, I rallied and brought the big fish to the rail and held it while it tossed the



Gaffing the Black Sea Bass.



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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spume over me, and gaffed it. One lift of its ponderous head, and it jerked the gaff from my hand, repeating this several times. Finally I hauled it up, held it, and announced that as my companion had now seen the capture of a big sea bass I could cut it away; but he rallied and insisted upon taking it in, to show what "we" had caught. In a weak moment I agreed to hold it while he rowed and towed it in. The wind picked up and nearly swamped us as we went around a point, but two hours later we had the monster in smooth water, where we hailed some fishermen and got the bass aboard. It comfortably filled the boat; in fact I had to sit on it, and the skiff's gunwale was just at the edge of the water; a slight wave would have filled her, so we hired the fishermen to convoy us, one on each side, and in two hours or more entered port with our fish, which weighed between three hundred and four hundred pounds.

This bass attains a weight of eight hundred or a thousand pounds. I know of an eight-hundred pounder taken in the Gulf of California. A remarkable contest was that of Mr. T. S. Manning with a huge fish weighing three hundred and ninety pounds. It towed him several miles off shore and into rough water, when the boat was prevented from filling by oil which his boatman poured around the boat. This was a rod catch, and a notable one. Since then many bass have been taken with the rod and the 21-strand line.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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Many of the Tuna Club members believe the great bass is a superior fish to the tuna. I do not agree in this, but I have not taken over ten or twelve bass of large size and have never been successful with a rod. That the fish is a mighty creature, that it requires a strong man to kill it, goes without saying, but it is, in my estimation, too ponderous to make a game fish of the first class, though I have had some splendid bouts, hand-to-hand, with it, and my failures with the rod have with one exception been due to the too light tips.

In this one exception I hooked the fish with a heavy rod, and frankly confess that I could not stop it. It was necessary to turn the colossus before it reached an outer kelp bed, but I could not turn it, neither could I pump up that mighty irresistible embodiment of force that moved on and on. I pumped, lifted and reeled until I had warning that I had met more than my match, and I surrendered. If I could have taken my time and had open water I think I could have landed the fish, but I failed to make a rapid finish, and as my companion was good naturedly jeering me and asking me why I didn't "go in and win," I handed him the rod, expressing the opinion that he could not do it.

This was one of those lucky "bluffs" which sometimes, though rarely, work. I really believed that my lusty companion with fresh wind could land my fish in a few seconds, and he took the rod with an air of



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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confidence that was at least interesting, and I, winded, lay back and became a looker on in Venice. But for some reason my companion did not start the fish, and though I politely offered my help and adjured him to "go in and win," as I had really worn the fish out, he could not do it, and a few moments later the bass made a rush and broke the line. Rarely do anglers agree on the size of a fish they have not seen, but I think we both "guessed" that sea bass at a ton.

Some of the astonishing records with these fishes have been made by women, and with a rod. The late Mr. F. S. Schenck of Brooklyn probably took more than any one, having a passion for the lusty sport. I recall his collection of photographs which filled an album—a remarkable record of contests with the giant of the bass tribe.

The visitor at the town of Avalon will see in the collection of the Tuna Club the cups and medals given to the heroes of the rod in their struggles with the big bass. Here is the black sea bass gold medal; the black sea bass cup, with the names of the winners, all men who fished with a rod, and line not much larger than an eyeglass cord.

At the dinners of the Tuna Club one may see a small black sea bass baked whole, a one hundred pounder brought in by waiters as they would a boar's head, and the young fish is excellent. Almost every year the record is beaten, and this season it stands in the name of Mr. Murphy, four hundred

## *Big Game at Sea*

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and thirty pounds. This angler carried off the tarpon record in the same year at Aransas Pass, Texas.

The coming in of a big black sea bass is always an event. As soon as a fish is hooked the boatman throws a big flag to the breeze, so that other boats may know that the fight is on, and when the fish is brought in the crowd gathers to see it hauled up the beach or hung on the rack to be weighed by the Tuna Club committee; and then comes the moment of triumph of the victorious angler. He stands up by the giant with his boatman and gaffer and has his catch taken—a most necessary piece of publicity; his rare experience will never be believed out of California, unless he can “prove it.” Even this is questioned by some doubters, as a singular character in Los Angeles conceived the idea of playing upon the credulity of the public and bought a big sea bass, which he mounted, bought a few cheap rods and advertised to give any one a picture with a sea bass for a dollar, and doubtless a number of these bogus catch pictures have been sent away by fun-loving people who have never fished in their lives. This same photographer has a bogus orange tree (this in an orange country) beneath which he places his victims and photographs them picking an orange, suggesting that it is not alone the Chinaman who is famed for “ways that are dark and tricks that are vain.”

There are some singular things about the great



Trophies of The Tuna Club.

1915



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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bass. The majority of those taken are females with egg masses weighing many pounds, but in twenty years' fishing I have never seen a young fish, though I understand several as small as eight pounds have been caught; but even in nets no very small fishes have been taken, and in all probability they are hatched inshore in August or September, and soon go out into deep water. The rocky shores and kelp forests of these islands of Southern California are their home, and where deep water cuts in near the mainland, as at Redondo, they are found in summer; but in winter they doubtless school and retire to the offshore plateaus, as Cortez and Tanner's banks, or enter deep water—that mysterious realm where sardines and small fry take up their home in the alleged cold months of winter.

Many confuse the black sea bass of Southern California with the Florida jewfish, an entirely different fish, a fish I have taken in Florida, and which is common all along the Gulf, large specimens being taken at Aransas Pass.

Our camp was on a key where, it was alleged, a lighthouse keeper had taken twenty thousand dollars in gold from an old wreck, and the pieces of this same vessel served us as firewood, according to Scope, and Scope was authority for everything on East Key in those days. The key was perhaps twenty acres in extent, covered with bay cedar and prickly pear, and over it hovered a cloud of gulls that could be seen

## *Big Game at Sea*

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two or three miles distant. The birds were laying, and their speckled eggs so covered the ground in the interior that it was difficult to walk in places without crushing them. The eggs were delicious, from the camping standard, and with green turtle steak and broiled kingfish and barracuda constituted our daily fare.

I had seen a jewfish (*Promicrops guttatus*) in Key West, a monster weighing three or four hundred pounds, a giant in brown, a big grouper; and now, being upon the jewfish domain, proposed to try conclusions with one. Scope protested that the old wreck, the larger portion of which was in the coral in thirty feet of water, was the lair of a particularly large jewfish. He had frequently hooked it and once had brought it to the surface; so, early one morning, we pushed off and anchored the dinghy over the old wreck. I confess that it is not to describe the jewfish, as it is a libel on the game fishes, that I have admitted it among this honorable company, but to illustrate the remarkable variety of fishes taken from this ancient vessel laden with doubloons. Jewfish tackle was an Eastern halibut line, a small shark hook baited with a five-pound yellowtail; and as it sometimes was a waiting proposition I threw over a handline rigged, as all lines were here, with a sinker on the bottom and the hooks six or eight inches above, thus enabling them to swing clear of coral. As soon as the single line reached the bottom I hooked a grunt, a three-

## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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pound fish beautifully marked with red, yellow, green and gold; as I unhooked it, it grunted and croaked so loud a protest that I tossed it back.

"'Scuse me, mawster," said Scope, "but dat settles it."

"Settles what?" I queried.

"De fishin'," replied Scope, rolling up his line in a peculiar overhand fashion. "Dat grunt dun gone down an' tole de res' of de fish."

I laughed him to scorn, but, nevertheless, it was the last bite I had for an hour; then I landed another grunt, and Scope reckoned "Dey had done forgot it," and unwound his line. I soon had a heavy bite, and after some good sport landed a hogfish, a great red be-finned creature which I had often taken off the barrier reef in the breakers. This was followed by a red grouper; then came yellowtails and a ten-pound porgy; finally a peculiar bite was felt, and after a struggle I jerked into the boat a murray nearly four feet long, a spotted, hideous creature, the image of a snake, which opened its mouth and made for Scope, who struck it down with the tiller. My next fish—mark the variety in the finny procession—was a sea porcupine, a fish often seen in curiosity stores, puffed up like a balloon and covered with spines. This is not its normal condition. My porcupine came up slim but fretful, its spines, as Scope said, all "pointed aft"; but the moment it was placed in the boat it began to grunt and to inflate itself until it assumed

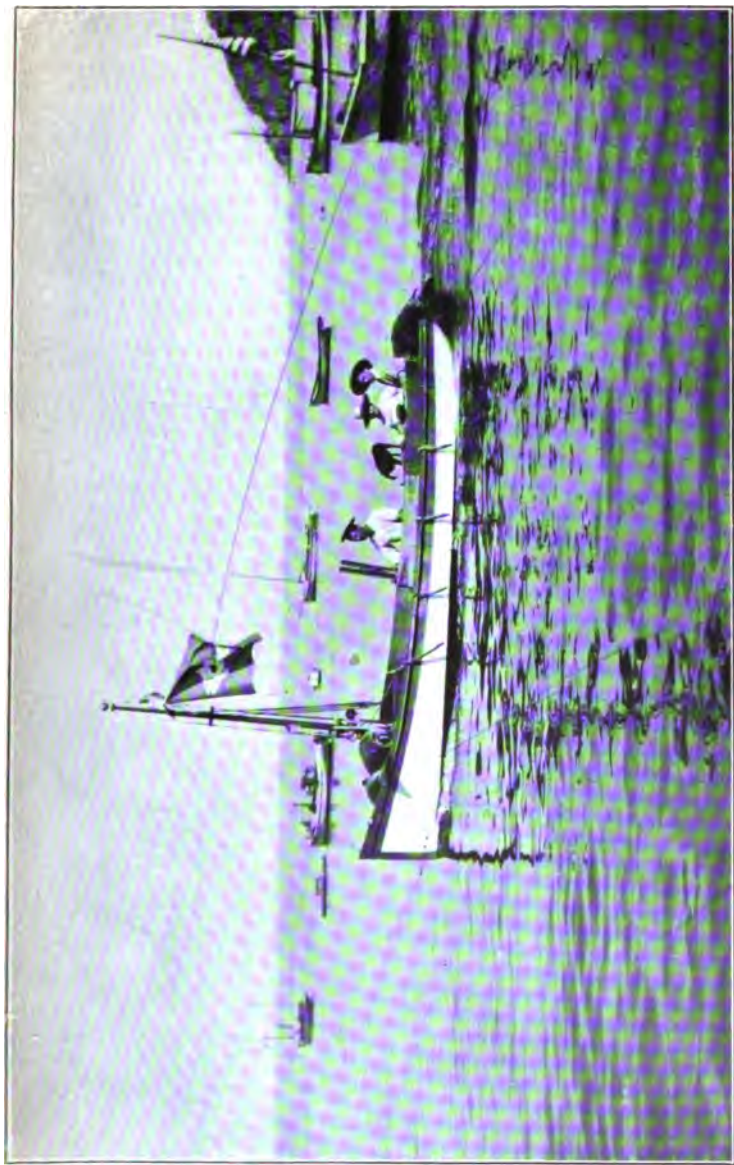
## *Big Game at Sea*

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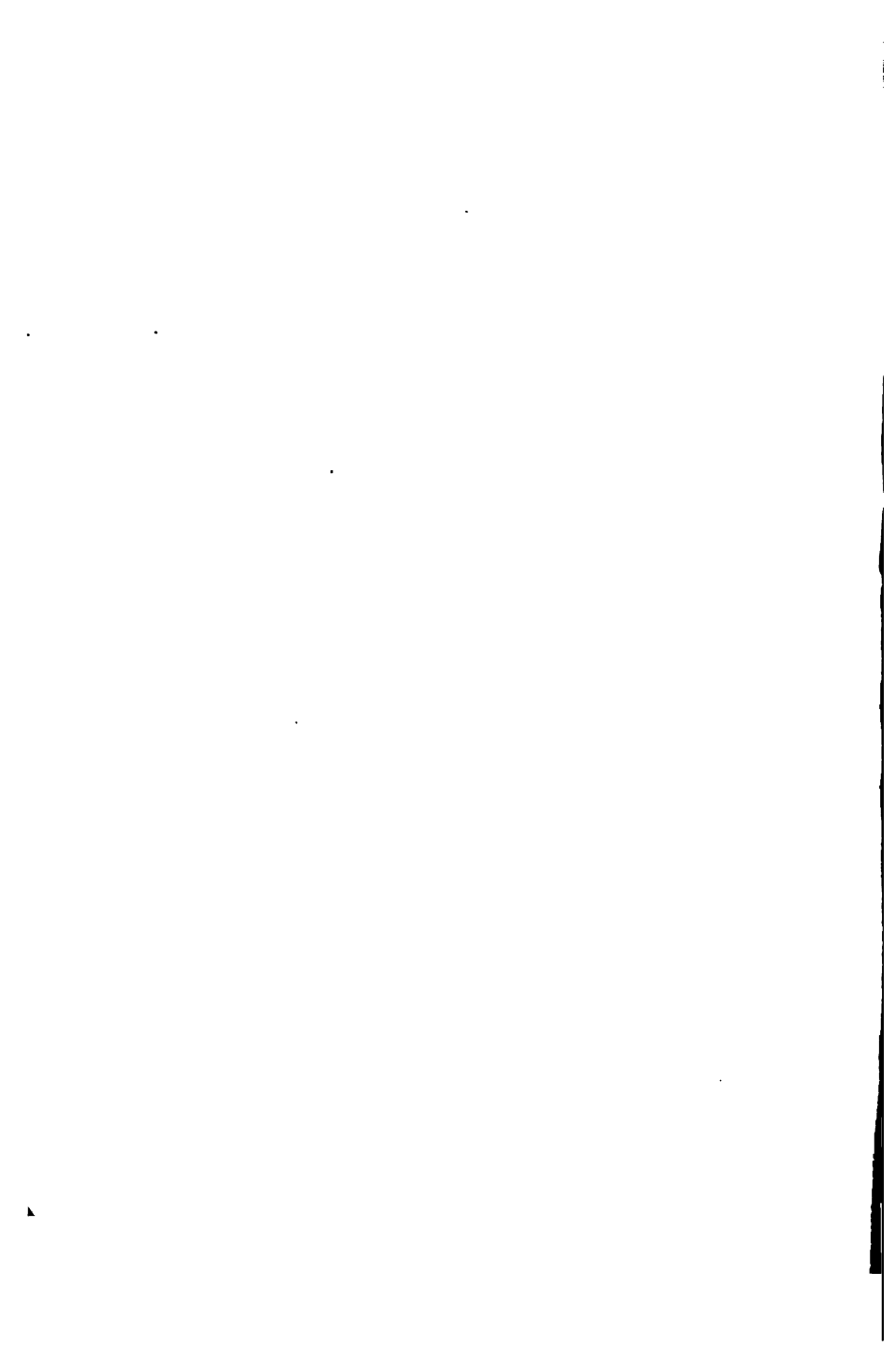
the shape of a balloon, its spines standing out in every direction, its head, eyes, and fins almost disappearing; and when tossed overboard to rid ourselves of a dangerous creature, it was perfectly helpless, blowing away before the wind like a gigantic soap bubble.

These fishes and many more were taken in almost as fast as they could be caught. The lure was crayfish. If this bait was changed, it was another story; if conch was used, red grouper, a big uninteresting fish, was invariably caught, which reminded me of cod-fishing off the Maine coast, though the cod is a whirlwind compared to this lethargic monster. This had gone on for over an hour, when I noticed the jewfish line slowly moving over. It was either a jewfish or a shark, and I slacked away until it was assumed that the fish had taken the bait, then gave him his strike. The response was immediate, and my arms went overboard before I could release the line, which, after a short rush, stopped. Assuming that the fish was gone, I hauled in, but it was there, and I draw a veil over the proceedings. At first I thought we had hooked the keel of the old galleon, but occasionally felt tremendous blows on the line. It was the jewfish, the original sulker, that simply held back and was finally hauled in, three hundred and sixty-four pounds of it, like a log, to roll over and twist and deluge us with spray, though I doubt if it ever realized that it was hooked.





Typical Santa Catalina Fishing Boat Coming into Avalon with (3) Sea Bass, and with Bass Flag Flying.



## *Adventures with the Biggest Bass*

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The great fish, to my mind, was a failure, though I have been told that smaller ones up the coast of Florida, where they live in holes, are very gamy, and have been taken with a rod. They are found on the South Atlantic coast, at Cuba, and on the Texas shore, and on the Pacific side of Central America there is another species. The smaller specimens are game, and are frequently taken when they follow a small fish that has been hooked, swallowing it, hook and all. When placed in the wells of fishermen they will, it is said, prey upon the other occupants, and to prevent it the fishermen sew up their mouths. The term jewfish is probably a corruption of June fish, as in that month they bite most frequently. The striking feature of the jewfish is its size, often, it is said, in Cuban waters, ranging up to six or seven hundred pounds. I can imagine that some individuals may display some hard fighting, but judging from my own experience, I cannot commend the Florida jewfish, though the small fish which are found in its vicinity will well repay the angler.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SILVER KING

**A** NUMBER of years ago I was floating down the St. John's River in Florida in a small steamer, dodging shad nets which the men would insist upon setting in midstream and which the steamer often struck, when I thought I saw a sabalo leap far ahead.

"Is there any tarpon fishing here?" I asked the skipper, who was leaning out of the pilothouse just over my head.

"Why, yes, sah, right in this identical place," he said, "I saw a tarpon leap aboard the steamer and land partly in the lap of a man who was leaning

NOTE.—Since this chapter was written, Mr. L. P. Streeter, Secretary of the Tuna Club, has accomplished the seemingly impossible by taking a large tarpon at Aransas Pass with a nine-ounce rod and a number-nine line. This catch created a sensation in sea angling circles, and the Aransas Pass Tarpon Club took form as a result, with Mr. Streeter as president, and prizes are now offered, and every effort will be made to put tarpon angling on the same high standard of sport as found at Avalon, California, where the Tuna and Light Tackle Clubs hold forth, and where club rods are no longer used for fishes not of the largest size. Up to the time of Mr. Streeter's catch the average tarpon rod has been an almost impossible machine from the standpoint of fair play to the game, and doubtless Mr. Streeter's catch will revolutionize methods both in Florida, Texas and Tampico; at least this is devoutly to be desired. The leaping tuna and large swordfishes, and the largest jewfish and black sea bass are really the only fishes which require the very stiff and heavy rods.

## *The Silver King*

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against the pilothouse, just as you are." The skipper looked around as though expecting a repetition, and to be on the safe side I got up and moved away, pretending to look over the rail. "He hit the man fair in the lap, rolled him over on the deck and busted the chair."

This induced me to go ashore at Pilottown, at the mouth of the river, where I had an interesting and varied experience catching everything from sharks to coons, and never seeing a tarpon or sabalo, though there are tarpon there at times. I "still-fished" for channel bass at the mouth of the river, where the tide was so swift that it brought heavy lead sinkers to the surface, helped land a huge sunfish which I sighted coming over the bar, and which grounded like a ship, keeled over and began to beat the water into foam, and soon fell a victim. I did my most exciting fishing at the mouth of the river where the channel came in near shore. The shad were running and the men were catching these delicious fish in great numbers, and after them, literally in their wake, came sharks of all kinds and degrees, colors and conditions of servitude. I noticed this at once, as my first cast from the beach resulted in hooking a large shark which carried me knee deep and then took the line; and forthwith I procured shark tackle, and with shad bait had the sport of my life with sharks, landing many single-handed from the beach, and finally losing line and a

## *Big Game at Sea*

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large log which an unseen monster dragged out to sea, and would have taken me also had I not retired.

The shad fishermen and pilots of Mayport, on the south shore, were an interesting people, many being descendants of the Minorcans who came to Florida a century ago. They all knew tarpon, but could not produce them, so I drifted down to New Smyrna, and so on down the Gulf to the jumping-off place, where I found tarpon, or sabalo as the man called it, while at another key the Conchs called it *Grande Écaille*, but it was all the same fish, the finest jumper in the world.

I was wading along shore one day at Bush Key when I saw, I believe, a dozen tarpons go into the air at once. One ran upon the beach, where I could have caught it, but I was interested to see the cause, and grains in hand, as I had been wading along the beach after crayfish, I ran down and found that a school or bunch of Silver Kings had been trying to go through a little channel and had been charged by a big ten-foot nurse shark, a harmless crab-eating beast, doubtless as frightened as themselves, but sending them into the air in a blaze of silver. Here was my tarpon ground, and at flood tide the following day I returned to the island, which I tried to find years later, but a hurricane had literally blown it into the sea.

The water here ranged from six to twenty feet in depth, and while the heat was extreme, raising great

## *The Silver King*

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billowy, nebulous waves over the sand, it was not unbearable. I stretched out on the edge of the key one day, and the boy having tossed out the big mullet bait, sat down to wait. Five strikes came, sharks and three unknown; then there was throwing the cast-net down the key for more mullet, and again the big bait went whizzing out. This time luck of a specious quality followed; the line began to run out, and not knowing whether it was a shark or something else I struck; no doubt about that, as up into the air went a shining gigantic beam of silver, exactly how high I dare not say. I thought ten feet, I believe fifteen, and there it seemed to my astonished eyes to hang, and fan the air, rolling completely over and dropping, belly up, a wide, open-mouthed horror with gills agape and blazing red, that might well startle a timid angler who had never seen anything of the kind before.

The tarpon struck the water with a mighty crash and made a run for the channel of two hundred feet, to stop which seemed an impossibility. But the fates favored me and by good fortune, when I had gotten out into water up to my waist, I stopped the fish, turned it into the lagoon, and reaching shore raced with the boy along the sands, trying to keep up with it.

“Look at dat fish fly, mawster. For de Lo'd, see dat sabalo stan' on his haid. See him stan' on de tail.”

## *Big Game at Sea*

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This and other cries came from my companion as the big fish went flying up the reef; now in the air, now sliding along the surface with a tremendous lateral bound, again in a graceful plunge into the very empyrean, and other gyrations that one would deem impossible in so large a fish.

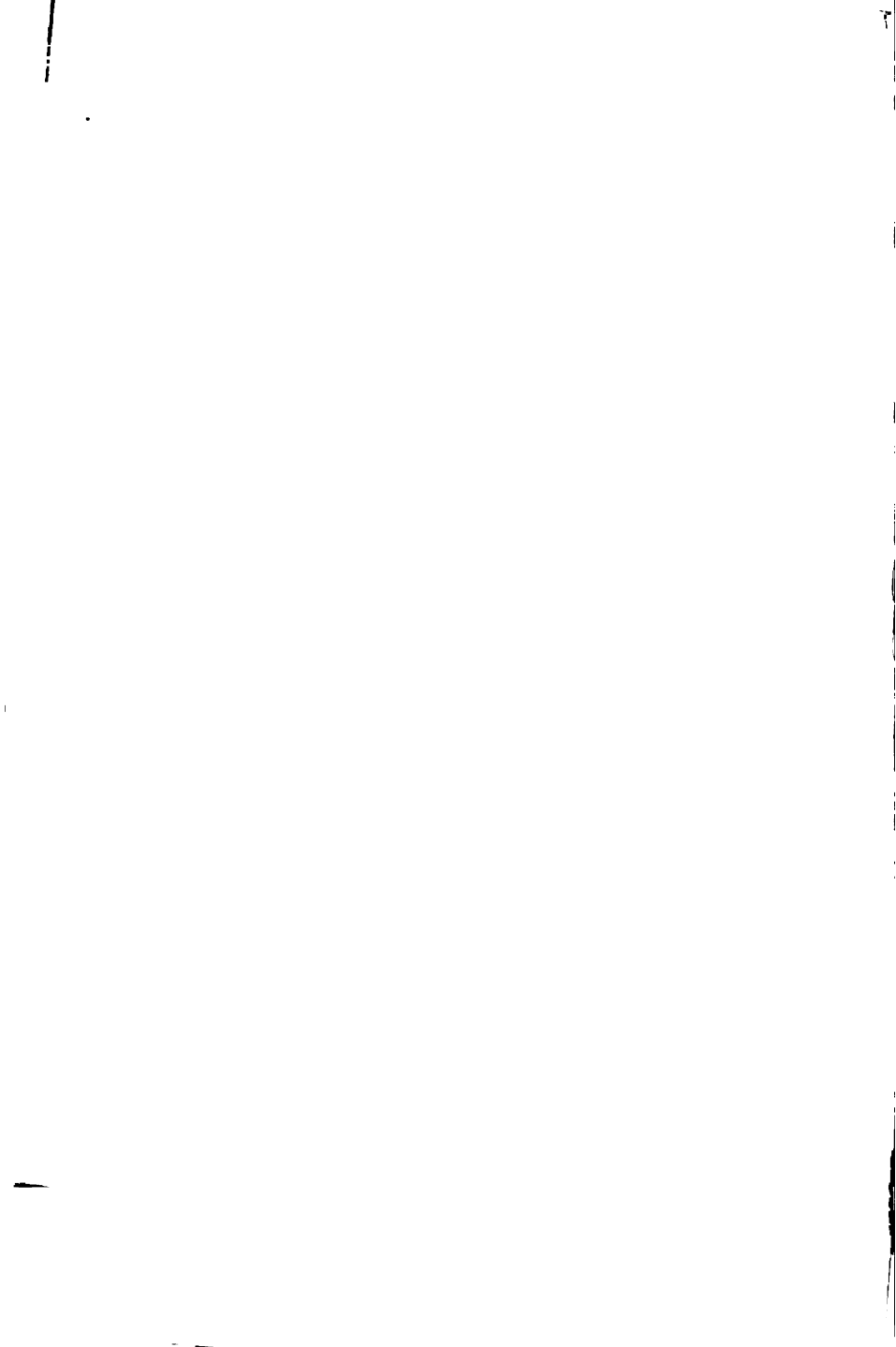
Sometimes it appeared to be dancing wildly on its tail, and then in a frenzy of rage would remain on the surface and beat the water with lusty blows from side to side that could be heard a long distance with the wind. For six hundred feet up along the sandy bay I walked, waded, and ran, having crossed the little shoal from Bush Key, and here played the splendid fish to a finish and kept it leaping and jumping until I had it in shoal water, when the boy grained it in default of the gaff, and hauled it, shining, gleaming, onto the sand.

If you have never seen a *sabalo*, imagine the Mediterranean sardine that you take from the box for lunch lengthened out to six or seven feet; give it two enormous black staring eyes, a supercilious lip of the most grotesque shape imaginable coming down and twisting up again, a mouth that can be thrown so wide open that thirty feet distant, when the fish is in the air, you can see blue sky down its throat and out through the arched gills; give the fish a greenish back and a long spine at the dorsal, a powerful sardine-like tail, and equip its belly and sides with scales which look more like newly minted dollars than





Author Catching "The Silver King." (1) The Strike. (2) A Heavy Rush. (3) Bringing the Fish to Gaff.



## *The Silver King*

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anything else, dollars often twice their natural size onto which the purest of molten silver had been dropped, scales that flash a thousand rays in every direction, and in the full glare of the sun form so many sunbursts to dazzle the eye and confuse the excited angler.

I have taken the sabalo under many circumstances, have seen it leap all over the Florida reef and down by the Rio Grande, where it forms in gigantic schools and moves south in the winter, and everywhere it is the same sensational equilibrist, the same "air climber" and "sky scraper" when hooked. What the sensations of the tarpon are when snared it would be difficult to say, but I fancy it is frightened and leaps in the direction away from the pain center, with no two leaps alike.

It may go directly up, carrying a big wave with it, and lash the air, or it may go out of water head first, rising like a ray of light ten or fifteen or more feet, to fall gracefully into the water. I have seen the frightened tarpon standing on its tail twelve feet up, as upright as a soldier, to exactly the opposite direction, and an angler told me that he had seen one make a lateral leap of thirty feet. I have, in hauling the seine on the Florida reef, seen the sabalo or tarpon come flying out of it with such force and rapidity that men dodged with great difficulty, and more than one man has lost his life in this way. Indeed the tarpon is a dangerous fish to experiment with. The

## *Big Game at Sea*

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angler is always taking a chance, as the fish is so uncertain and irrationable that it is just as liable to leap into your boat as anywhere else, and if all the stories and experiences of the tarpon anglers could be collected, an interesting showing of great chances taken would be made. I have seen a tarpon wreck a boat, hurling chairs, tackle, oars into the air. A tarpon has been known to come down and go through the bottom of a boat as though it was made of paper. A boat was found drifting in Galveston Bay some years ago containing a dead tarpon and a dead angler. The fish had broken the man's back.

A friend of mine was fishing when a companion one hundred feet away had a strike, and the fish came aboard my friend's boat, struck his chair, knocking it overboard. In a past season a tarpon in Florida came into a boat and knocked the angler overboard, sending the oarsman over onto his back. When the latter picked himself up he found his patron gone; looking over the side he saw him sinking and with the boat hook brought him up. He was stunned, and later examination showed that two ribs were broken. Between tiger hunting and tarpon fishing as a steady occupation, the former might be chosen as the safer pastime.

There is not so much danger when one is fishing in the open water, but when ten or twenty boats are following one another out a narrow pass, every boat is menaced by the fish that is hooked by the angler

## *The Silver King*

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just ahead, and more than once I have stood ready to dodge or jump overboard to avoid the mad leap of a wild sabalo which went into the air alongside my boat, but on the hook of a fellow angler ahead. Tarpon fishing is without doubt the most sensational and exciting of sports, and one of the most dangerous when persistently followed, but the writer has been fortunate. I have seen my boat swept by a mad tarpon, while hanging on over the stern to keep out of reach of the tail, my boatman as far forward. If you have the field, or are not near any one, you are fairly safe, but to give an idea how much room a wild tarpon wishes, I was fishing once at Aransas Pass, and as near as I can recall there were ten anglers, all in little skiffs, and a line of five near the jetty, of which I was in the middle. Another line of five, a quarter of a mile long perhaps, held the middle of the channel. I hooked a tarpon not twenty feet from the jetty. He went into the air ten feet from me, came down almost hitting the boat. I remember I dodged, then I saw him bound into the air over my shoulder, going so high that I had to look up at him, and then I saw him go bounding over the channel in a series of marvelous leaps, nearly hitting one boat and missing another by a miracle. I was using a nine-foot rod of heavy greenheart, a big reel of the Vom Hofe make, one which I had tested on tuna and black sea bass, and which held six hundred feet of a 21-strand Cuttyhunk line. It was

## *Big Game at Sea*

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equipped with a powerful leather pad and I was using a little wooden lever; yet that splendid leaper carried away five hundred feet or more of line as it went dancing into the air and over the pass. It towed us into midstream and away to the south, ran into seas which were piling in. I saw it take a last splendid leap on the crest of a big wave, fall in the hollow, and had just concluded that the game was up, when I stopped it by a miracle. With extraordinary rapidity it went coursing in a big circle around across the channel again, ever and anon making a wild leap into the air, a menace to any boat, a living catapult that could have killed a man with a single blow of its powerful tail.

In a few moments the fish was in the breakers on the north side of the pass, and while my man held the skiff head on, to prevent foundering, I played the splendid game and by great good luck brought him to the boat, from which he soon swam away free. It is the honored custom to cut away all tarpon caught at Aransas Pass after the length has been obtained; and as the rod catch here last year was eight hundred and fifty, the lives of many splendid fishes are saved and a high standard of sport sustained.

Aransas Pass is without question the finest location for tarpon angling in America, as the catch is absolutely sure. You can fairly count on four or five a day from April or May until October, subject of course to the ordinary hard-luck times. My fishing

## *The Silver King*

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there was at the hottest period, August 1st, yet I found it comfortable on the fishing grounds and mosquitoes were not a pest, which cannot be said of Florida, with all its charms of location. Theoretically, tarpon can be found from Aransas Pass all around the Gulf to the St. John's on the east coast of Florida in summer, but there is a vast difference in location.

Up to within a few years winter tarpon fishing has been unknown, but Tampico, Mexico, has been discovered to be the winter home of the great bands of tarpon which sail up and down the coast winter and summer in their various migrations, and in the brackish mouth of the Panuco River the great fish lie in countless numbers and afford sport under conditions which are doubtless much more comfortable than those of Florida. It is possible to-day, then, to find tarpon at any time, there being three great regions: that of the Southern Florida coast on both sides down to Key West, which can be fished from March or April to October, the season varying at different points; the Aransas Pass region, where the season is the same, and Tampico in midwinter.

While this article is being written I have received a letter from the Panama coast telling me of the capture of a large fish called the sabalo, showing that the great game fish is in the Pacific. Curiously enough, it has never been seen on the Californian coast where the water is moderately warm, but on

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the Atlantic side the appearance of the tarpon is heralded at times as far north as Cape Cod. During the summer of 1906 living tarpon were to be seen for a limited period in the New York Aquarium, the fishes having been taken in or about New York harbor.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MADNESS OF FISHES

**A**T certain times various predatory fishes seem to go mad from the excitement of the chase. Once when lying at the island of San Nicolas, in the Pacific, I saw a large school of yellowtails dash into a little cove, Corral Harbor, and rush a school of sardines out upon the sands. In their excitement, the large fishes, ranging from ten to thirty pounds, dashed completely out of the water, paying no attention to the men who were wading among them, killing them with oars and tossing them out upon the beach. The same thing is occasionally seen at Avalon, when the bag is filled with the big game which bites at everything and anything, and is hauled upon the sands by scores. At such a time the fishes are crazed; they lose their habitual caution, and do not heed their enemy, man.

Such exhibitions are more often seen at the tropics, where every day in the long summer, from June to November, such spectacles as the following may be witnessed, and in which as a spectator or angler I have often participated.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The Mexican Gulf was sprinkled with emeralds in settings of white coral sand, and upon these islets, the *cayo* of the Spanish, the sun beat with a fierce and torrid heat. Not a breath fanned the air, the heat appealing even to the eyes, rising from the sandy beaches and distorting every object. The cranes standing on the point loomed up like grotesque giants; the gnarled roots of mangroves, half a mile away, resembled sea monsters that had crawled out upon the sand, and all nature seemed in revolt. The blue sea, which stretched away to seeming infinity, blending and melting into the horizon, was asleep; even the great fringing reef, which ordinarily breasted the seas so gallantly, was almost silent, giving out but a sullen roar, with which the sharp, oft-repeated "ha-ha" of the laughing gulls were the only sounds which broke the stillness. Here and there a sharp fin cut the water in circles, telling of a wandering shark; then a flash of silver, a shower of spangles, suggested that the tarpon or some equally voracious enemy was following the mullet shoals.

On such a day we launched the little dinghy, shoved off, and headed for Bird Key, to replenish the larder. Eggs were the desiderata, and we had carried an empty flour barrel to take them back in, a receptacle at once suggestive of the possibilities of supply and demand. Bird Key was about two miles distant, and as we rowed along the dinghy passed over a garden of the sea. A deep channel, a ribbon

## *The Madness of Fishes*

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of turquoise, wound in and out among groves of coral, and crossing this we shot along over the city of the coral polyp. The great mass of points were olive-hued. Here patches of leaf coral in palmate form; on the edge of the channel huge heads four or five feet across and three or more in height, some hollowed out like vases and filled with groups of fishes with all the hues of the rainbow. The color display was a delight to the eye. The prevailing hue was olive, broken here and there with brilliant patches of yellow, brown, and lilac, where the fan of plume-like gorgonias waved in the gentle current.

Suddenly the boat passed out upon a sandy bottom of opaline hue, where pink-lipped conches lumbered along and ugly holothurians stretched their lazy lengths. Then presently we drifted over a carpet of algæ, delicate tufts of exquisite green, lace-like vines of the most delicate design, among which were small heads of meandrinæ, columns of white and black echini standing out in strong relief. These were the gardens of the sea, indeed; forests in miniature, peopled by finny birds of gorgeous coloring, which added to the splendor of this world of silence.

As we neared the key a low intense noise became apparent, growing louder and louder as the boat neared the shore; then, as her bow ran into the white, sandy beach, gulls rose upward in such prodigious numbers that they formed a dark cloud over the key, which could be distinctly seen two miles away.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The noise was deafening, and increased so when we penetrated the bush and began to collect the eggs that it was impossible to converse without screaming. The eggs fairly covered the sand in places, and in a short time the barrel was filled. As we returned to the beach, exhausted by the fiery heat of the bay-cedar bushes, we were confronted by a strange sight. The water along the beach for two hundred yards was a mass of foam, and the air filled with leaping fishes. A school of jacks (*Caranx hippos*) had followed a school of sardines and were chasing them inshore, and now crazed by the sight of their prey, were charging the mass, leaping upon the shore in scores, presenting a scene which for excitement and animation it would be difficult to equal.

Shoving off, we were soon on the outskirts of the school and in the very heat of the battle of extermination. The small fishes were packed along shore in a solid black mass; now leaping out of the water, flashing in the sun like molten silver, and creating a continuous blaze of light. Into this the jacks, heavy, blunt-headed fishes with silver sides and yellow fins, gay creatures weighing eight or ten pounds, were rushing like so many thunderbolts. Long ago they had been satiated, and were now killing for the mere desire for blood, evidently aroused to a high state of frenzy by the sight of it. Seizing a handline, I baited it with a wounded sardine and tossed it over. Hardly had it struck the water before one of the

## *The Madness of Fishes*

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powerful fishes seized it, took it on the run and darted off, snapping it at the first strain.

I soon found that no bait was refused; a bit of cloth served as a lure and was eagerly taken by the wild and excited jacks. They invariably took the hooks with a rush, and never stopped, going on with a force which was almost irresistible, and affording great sport from the standpoint of handline fishing. They were cunning, despite their wild excitement, and once hooked, tried all the tricks that a gamy fish is master of to break the line; now coming in with inconceivable velocity, so that slack could not be taken in; then, turning to dash away, making the line hiss and fairly scream, hoping thus to attain force enough to take it unawares and snap the strands. Finding this of no avail, they would swim in a circle, dive beneath the boat, or plunge madly into the demoralized throng. There was no surrender to the jack, it came in fighting to the last, leaping, plunging, and often escaping after it had been landed in the dinghy.

The sport became fast and furious, the whirling lines hardly struck the water before they were hissing through it, and splashes and victorious shouts from excited anglers, added to the sullen and peculiar roar of the beat itself, which could easily be heard a quarter of a mile. The jacks had formed a cordon about the school and hundreds were in the air at a time, presenting a rare and animated spectacle. Every

## *Big Game at Sea*

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moment the jacks drove the dark line of sardines closer in. They seemed to be acting by some preconcerted arrangement; now darting into them in platoons or long lines, and with such force that they penetrated the mass of small fry and went spinning out upon the sands, to leap and bound about, finding their way again into the silvery mass.

My boatman, who, I found, had the government contract for providing the garrison fish supply, was now standing knee-deep among the fish, catching the jacks by the tail as they floundered among the sardines, and hurling them high and dry upon the beach. In this unique manner he caught scores, while numbers leaped so high up on the sands that they could not reach the water again, and so became victims to their own temerity and madness. For half an hour this exciting scene lasted, then, satiated with the spoils, the jacks drew off, leaving the beach covered with their own forces and the sardines, while all along shore a dull red cloud floated away, telling the sanguinary story. The noise of the beat had at the very onset attracted the laughing gulls, pelicans, and man-of-war birds, that dashed into the mêlée and gorged themselves with the wounded small fry, adding not a little to the excitement of the scene, which well illustrated the war waged by the stronger upon the weaker in all life.

These beats were of common occurrence in their particular season, April, May, June, and when the

## *The Madness of Fishes*

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peculiar sound made by the beating upon the water of myriads of tails would come from the adjacent keys, the gulls would be seen flying, the lumbering pelicans heading in that direction, and another war of extermination began. The jack, like many of its kinsmen, traveled in large schools with a roving commission, and under ordinary circumstances could not be induced to bite. The wild excitement of carnage seemed necessary to arouse them, but I found by following on the edge of schools I could induce the stragglers on the outposts to take a live bait or even a dead one when manipulated properly. Such a fish, taken with rod and reel, was a revelation, and I give the jack a place high among the marine game fishes of the Florida reef; too brave a fighter to take with a large handline when the odds are all against it.

## CHAPTER XIX

### BARRACUDA

**T**HEY called him Barracuda down on the reef. He was long, thin, loose-jointed, with a long, pointed nose; a typical Cracker, with long, dead-gold hair and big freckles, and for some time I supposed the name applied to his looks, the barracuda being a long, pointed-jawed fish very common in the vicinity. I had been told that Barracuda was the best guide and fisherman on the reef. He had a big sloop and smaller boats, a comfortable home on Key St. Vincente, so I had hunted him up, and Barracuda and myself were under a three months' engagement to hunt and fish among the Florida keys. He was a very quiet fellow, rarely speaking, and I do not know that I ever saw him laugh, yet he was not taciturn, and was simply a quiet, good-natured man of whom you would not expect great things.

A few days after I was settled at the key, we went out in the dinghy, and I had my first experience with Barracuda and the fish whose name he bore. I was desirous of learning all the tricks of the reef, and he proposed to show me how he took the barracuda—



## *Barracuda*

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the biggest and gamiest fish to be found in the waters of the reef.

As I followed him down to the boat he had a small pair of oars in one hand and over his shoulder a long, slender pole which vibrated like willow. It was twelve feet long, and bore on one end a two-pronged spear, whose barbs were deftly made to close up as they struck and open out again. The "grains," as the spear was called, fitted on to the end of the pole and was held by a long cord, the coil of which the fisherman held in his hand.

Jumping into the boat, we shoved off, and upon reaching the channel, not one hundred yards away, Barracuda threw over a white rag fastened to a line about five feet long, and began to slowly scull the boat along in the direction of the sun. He presented a picturesque if not a graceful figure at this work, his tall form bending by the regular movement of the left arm as he propelled the oar with a screw-like motion. In his right hand rested the long, trembling pole, while the rope was coiled up at his feet.

We had gone perhaps two hundred yards when I noticed the lank form of my guide stiffen up. He now moved the oar very gently, and in a low voice told me to look over his shoulder. I did so, and about twenty feet astern saw a fish nearly eight feet in length swimming along, evidently watching like a cat the white rag that whirled over and over as it darted ahead, every few minutes turning upon its side

## *Big Game at Sea*

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so that I could see its sharp muzzle and big, black eyes; then alarmed, possibly at the whirling, it dropped back again.

When I had seen how the fish was lured within reach of the grains, I leaned back, and Barracuda dropped the oar just as the fish darted ahead, a little to one side, eying the rag. Slowly the long spear came up, and, taking it in both hands, the fisherman leaned far back and hurled it with an aim so unerring that it struck the fish fairly in the back, throwing the pole out of the socket with the rebound. A second later a magnificent fish sprang into the air, shaking itself violently to free itself from the sharp iron and falling with a crash to dash away. The line was soon exhausted, the coils leaping overboard like some living thing, and then the light boat turned and dashed away, towed at a rapid rate by the gamy fish. Foot by foot it was taken in, struggling, thrashing, leaping, in its efforts to escape, and finally was brought alongside and lifted into the boat, where it beat the frail planks and performed some mighty acrobatic feats.

The fish was striped like a pike, with a sharper nose, large black eyes and a display of sharp, pearly, cutting, tearing teeth that made it a foe to be avoided. It was nearly seven feet long and weighed at least one hundred pounds. But this is estimated.

In this skillful way Barracuda took several of the fish, bidding me note that he always sculled against

## *Barracuda*

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the sun to dazzle the eyes of the fish. I then assumed that my guide had been given the name of this fish, perhaps, on account of his skill in taking it, but this was not so, as I learned later. He was away from camp one day when a sloop came down to anchor off our key. The crew rowed ashore to inquire after Barracuda, and from them I learned the man's singular experience. Some years ago he lived on Sea Horse Key, one of the Bahamas, and during one of the terrible hurricanes that sometimes pass over that region in September, a brig was driven on the reef and broken up. The crew and every one on board were, one by one, washed away and swallowed up by the sea, with the exception of a woman, who must have been lashed to the spars. While the little bunch of fishermen were watching her, helpless to aid, McNally—that was his name—came down to the shore and began to take off his clothes, announcing that he was going to swim out to the wreck and bring the woman in. The fishermen tried to dissuade him, as the sea was so rough and threatening, but, fastening about his waist a stout cord that was in turn made fast to a rope, he plunged into the water. Several times they lost sight of him, and once they saw him turn and strike at something, and feared a shark had bitten him, but he kept on and finally reached the wreck and succeeded in attaching the line to it by which the woman was brought to the shore. When McNally was coming back he was seen to sink near the shore,

## *Big Game at Sea*

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then come up, beating something off. When the men dragged him ashore it was found that he had been attacked by barracudas, both coming from and going to the wreck. One fish had struck him on the arm, tearing it viciously, and on the return another had bitten him severely. From this experience he was called and known to everybody as Barracuda.

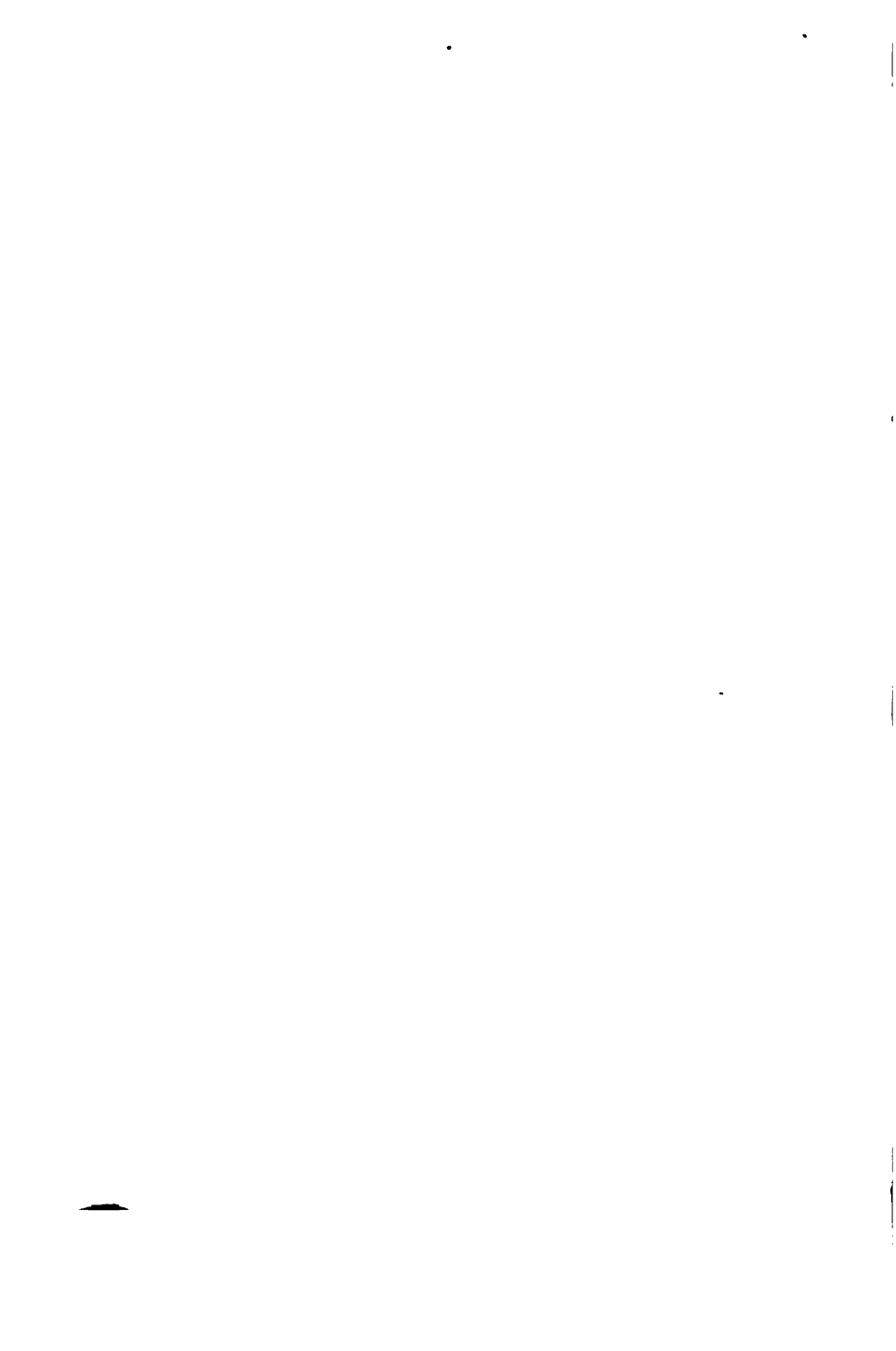
These large and vicious fishes abounded in the channel, and several men had been almost killed by them, so I was told.

The barracuda is not generally included in the list of fishes dangerous to man, but it is none the less so, its habit of darting at any white object it sees making the act of swimming where it is found more or less dangerous. Numbers of instances have been reported, and the writer recalls one, where a barracuda had been placed in the well of a sloop and forgotten, and which attacked a man who entered it to make some repairs, maiming him for life.

An illustration of the danger that sometimes lies in small fishes is the case of a fish which is common in the rivers of South America, the serrasalmo. It is probably the most fearless of all fishes, very small, of peculiar shape, with powerful jaws, so strong and sharp that they can bite a piece out of an animal as neatly as though it had been done with a pair of scissors. In some sections it is impossible to fish, as the moment a fish is hooked thousands of these vicious creatures flock to the spot and tear it in pieces



**The California Barracuda.**



## *Barracuda*

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before it can be brought to the surface. The fish apparently does not know what fear is, and has in more than one instance jeopardized human life, if not destroyed it. A traveler in crossing a river on horseback was attacked by these fishes, the blood from his horse's legs attracting them in such multitudes that they soon stripped the flesh from its legs so that it fell over, maddened with fear and agony, and was soon drowned. The rider leaped from its back and swam to shallow water, surrounded by the throng, and, though protected by his clothing, he was bleeding from many wounds, and in deep water would doubtless soon have been killed by the ravenous, blood-thirsty fishes.

When down on the reef, I met a collector who had recently made a trip up the Amazon for Professor Agassiz and, I think, Professor Baird. He had found a number of new fishes, among them a giant which he said compared to the tarpon and others in affording sport. In answer to my request for his experiences with the fish, he narrated to me in substance the following, relating to this giant fish which is at times literally run to its death by otters:

“Listen,” whispered our Indian guide, dropping the oars and sitting rigid as a statue in an attitude of expectancy.

For a moment nothing was heard but the ripple of the waters and the occasional cry of some bird from the thick forest that lined the bank. Then came a

## *Big Game at Sea*

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resounding splash, followed by another, apparently proceeding from around the bend ahead.

'The *arapaima!*' exclaimed the Indian, his eyes sparkling with excitement; and he lifted out his spear, placing it ready for use, then slowly rowed on.

We were moving up one of the upper branches of the Amazon on a hunting and fishing trip, and José, our guide, had promised to take us to the lair of the game fish of South American waters—a monster that attained a length of twelve feet and a weight of twelve hundred pounds, and upon whose strength and activity he was never weary of dilating.

The river bank which we were passing was four or five feet in height, and covered to its very edge with trees, which in turn were wound with interminable vines or lianes. The stream was continually undermining the banks, bringing down sections of forest into the water with a resounding reverberation, and which floated away as small islands. Soon again José stopped rowing, and again we heard the peculiar splash repeated several times in succession. We were now at the turn, only a narrow spit being between us; and as the Indian pulled cautiously, we turned just in time to see an enormous fish hurl itself clear of the water, shake itself like a dog in convulsive bends, seemingly scattering a number of small animals that were clinging to it.

'The otter!' said our guide, briefly, giving the canoe a vigorous pull which sent it into the stream.



## *Barracuda*

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'See, they are after the *arapaima*.' And now we observed five or six cat-like animals swimming about in the water, as if looking for prey. In a few seconds they dived, and up came the gigantic fish, so near the boat that we distinctly saw its plight as it rolled over and over. Clinging to it by the gills and fins and throat were several of the little animals, while a number were following and diving after the monster. When they saw the canoe they dropped away and made for the shore. I was tempted to shoot, but the Indian had seized his spear and was now in the bow, asking us to row slowly along.

Instead of a branch of the river, we were in a small inlet or bay, not over six feet in depth, and up this the *arapaima* had dashed, as we could see by the ripple, and would soon reach the end and turn. This was just what occurred. The big fish almost ran out of water on a sand bar, scattering a score of turtles that were sunning themselves there, and then, with a convulsive effort, turned and plunged again in our direction.

On it came, its big fin cutting the water like a knife, reminding one of a shark. As it reached us, José drew back and plunged the spear into its side with an underhand blow that lodged beneath the pectoral fin in a vulnerable spot. The moment the fish felt the cold steel it gave a magnificent leap partly into the air, seeming to rise bodily, showing at once its enormous size, the gleaming coat of armor-like scales

## *Big Game at Sea*

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with which it was enveloped, and also dragging with it three of the otters that had apparently with remarkable ferocity clung to their victim.

The fall of the fish so near the canoe almost swamped it; but José jerked the handle of the harpoon from its socket, tossed over the coil of line, and with a vigorous sweep of the paddle turned the frail craft in the direction of midstream just in time, as it dashed away with the speed of an arrow, then trying to leap into the air, to fall back heavily, beating the water with its ponderous tail.

These actions soon exhausted the line, and with a jerk the canoe dashed ahead, towed by the *arapaima*. There was no need for José's warning to get astern; the first lunge of the fish sent the bow of the canoe deep into the water, half-filling it, at which we tumbled aft as best we could. This brought the bow up into the air, where José stood and managed the line, with his knife between his teeth, ready to cut it if necessary. With unerring instinct, the fish made for midstream and deep water, towing us at a rate not to be despised by a steamboat, making the water hiss about the bow and carrying a big wave of disagreeable dimensions on either side.

In the stream were numerous trunks of palms that had been undermined and were on their slow journey down the river, and beneath one of these the big fish plunged. It was evident that the end had come; but José was equal to the emergency; and seizing the

## *Barracuda*

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paddles, he guided the canoe around the root, and on we sped. 'He soon get sick,' José kept repeating; and finally, when the fish had made a desperate plunge to the bottom, he began to take in the line, passing it along so that each one aided in the work.

That one fish, about eleven feet in length, could weary and tire out three men seems incredible, but it is a fact. The rushes of the gamy monster were of a kind undreamed of by the sportsmen, and when its plunges came, they could not be met. The line hissed through our fingers and smoked as it went over the slight gunwale; and to have fastened it meant a break; so we possessed ourselves in patience and played the game, allowing it to wear itself out, which in time it did. When the line slackened we took it in, hand over hand, as rapidly as we could, every pull felt by the fish being answered by a lunge that sent the rope hissing through our already burned fingers. But finally the pace began to tell on the big fish. It had towed the canoe an eighth of a mile with leaps, plunges and struggles that proved it a worthy foe-man, and now gradually succumbed. Its rushes grew less and less frequent, and without the force and power that characterized them at the onset, and finally José announced that the game was up; the fish barely responded to the hauls on the rope, and the fight was over. The fish sulked like a salmon and allowed itself to be hauled alongside without a struggle, merely moving its great tail back and forth, propelling the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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canoe slowly along. Once alongside, a shot in the vertebræ of the neck put an end to it, and it was towed ashore and hauled upon the sand bar, where its dimensions could be admired. No wonder it towed us at steamboat speed so long. No wonder it had put our endurance to the severest test. The fish was over eleven feet in length and must have weighed one thousand or eleven hundred pounds. It was encased in an armor of scales of extreme hardness that would easily have resisted a bullet or caused it to glance.

That so large a creature should be attacked by the otter, a small and apparently harmless animal, is somewhat remarkable. Taken singly, the animals are insignificant, but when banded together they become a menace to the largest fish. Their method of attack reminds one of a pack of hounds. They follow their prey in packs, and in the case of the great *arapaima*, dash upon it while at rest in shallow water, and fastening their teeth in it at every available spot, cling to it until the fish rises to the surface in complete exhaustion in its efforts to shake off the otters. Often the latter are drowned, and specimens of the fish have been found stranded with dead otters clinging to them, their teeth clinched through the fins, showing their bulldog-like pertinacity if not ferocity."

## CHAPTER XX

### A SEA-GOING CROCODILE

**A** NUMBER of years ago, I spent several weeks fishing at the mouth of the St. John's River, Florida, and while there I heard much about the "sharp-nosed gater," and met a man who told me that he could take me to a place way down the river where lived the biggest alligator in Florida—an old fellow twenty feet long. I was so positive that such an animal did not exist that I asked the man if he would enter into an agreement with me that I should defray all the expenses of the expedition and pay him two dollars a day if the animal proved to be twenty feet long, or even eighteen; while if it fell short of this he should meet the expenses. He readily agreed to this, and I congratulated myself that I was really on the trail of a giant. A few days later we started across country for the river to the south. It is useless to go into the disagreeable features of this quest. We hunted over swamps and pools for days, slept in the open, fighting mosquitoes; indeed, I had what I remember to be the most disagreeable time of my life, and finally found the giant—an alligator

## *Big Game at Sea*

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not quite eleven feet in length. All that my guide could say, as it lay on the ground, was: "Well, I'll be dogged, boss. I'd sworn that 'gator was over twenty foot long." The moral is, that what the unscientific observer thinks he sees and what he really does see is a very different question. Mr. Ralph Monroe, of South Florida, has told me many interesting incidents regarding the American crocodile, one of which was that he had repeatedly seen the animal *out on the reef*, evidently fishing.

One night in the little public house at Mayport a fellow angler, just in from a successful day with the channel bass, related the following, which bears interestingly on the sea-going habit of the American crocodile:

"When I first went down around Cape Florida and up the rivers, the old Indian I had as a guide told me that he had not only caught 'gators,' but one variety especially, called the 'sharp-nosed 'gator,' that caused no end of trouble and was very cunning and wicked. All the fishermen have their yarns, so I paid little or no attention to him, until one day when, sailing over by a reef in a small dinghy, old Bob reached over and touched me, and pointed to a black object just discernible moving about in shallow water.

"'Sharp-nosed 'gator,' said the old man.

"'A 'gator two miles out to sea?' I asked, doubtfully.

"'Yes, sir,' was the reply; and so it proved. I ran

## *A Sea-Going Crocodile*

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up within rifle-shot, and distinctly saw the animal swimming away. According to the Indian, they swam out to the reef to go fishing—catching birds, fish, and anything else; and later on I found them on an island off shore to which they must have swam; so the Florida crocodile is to no little extent a marine reptile like some of its ancestors in the early geological days.

“My old guide daily regaled me with stories of the ‘sharp-nosed ’gator,’ and I finally made up my mind that I must have one as a trophy; so preparations for a crocodile hunt were forthwith made. Old Bob told me that he knew a little swamp-like place, on a key about ten miles down, where he was confident I could get one of the ’gators, and one morning found us going down the coast in a flat-bottomed cat-boat which I used for coasting purposes, and towing a small dinghy, provided with rifle, harpoon and shark-hook—three weapons that were used in the capture of the reptiles.

“We landed on the key and made our camp, anchoring the cat-boat, and the next day started on the hunt—Bob, rowing the dinghy up the beach, recalling stories of the crocodiles he had seen in his youth, and allowing his imagination full play. We pulled a mile or more, and then came to a bend beyond which was a small creek, into which the boat was headed.

“What appeared to be a creek gradually enlarged, and we soon emerged into an enclosed bay of some

## *Big Game at Sea*

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extent, but filled up with tall grasses common to such places. The tide, in its rising and falling, had apparently cut channels here and there, and through one we passed, finding a succession of beaches of soft mud leading up to the brush—most inviting spots for the sleepy reptiles.

“Slowly we poled along, passing many such, but no signs of a crocodile, and I was well nigh discouraged, and had put down my rifle, and was about to fill my pipe, when the old Indian stopped the dinghy suddenly, and gave a deep and mysterious hiss. I sprang to my feet and looked in the direction indicated, where, sure enough, was the black form of something; perhaps a log, perhaps not.

“‘That’s him,’ whispered Bob; and taking hold of the grass by clumps, he drew the dinghy along until we were in a position concealed, yet commanding a good view of the reptile. It was indeed a crocodile; even from that distance the difference between it and an alligator being noticeable in a clearer and more rakish built and sharper nose. He was at least thirteen feet long—a big fellow even for an alligator.

“It was evident that he could not escape us readily; so I determined to give him a rifle bullet, then shove quickly to the mouth of the bay, and let him have the grains or harpoon if he attempted to go out. Old Bob steadied the dinghy, and, taking careful aim, I fired. I heard the sharp ring of the bullet, and the next second the tail of the monster swung around to



## *A Sea-Going Crocodile*

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his head with a ringing blow, and he scrambled into the water and shot away, followed by a big wave.

“We had but twenty or thirty feet to go, and reached the entrance just in time to see the big fellow coming. As he went by, in about three feet of water, I hurled the spear into him; the next moment the dinghy was flying through the water, as if behind a side-wheeler, sending the foam into the air, while the Indian and myself lay back, braced against the thwarts, and hung on to the line for dear life.

“Such a heat could not be of long duration, and after hauling us down the reef for half a mile our reptilian steed showed signs of weakening, whereupon the Indian began to haul in the line. This started the crocodile to renewed exertions; but it was a temporary spurt, and we soon succeeded in getting alongside. As the corrugated back appeared at the surface, glistening in the sunlight, I put another bullet into it; and now I have to call your attention to what I consider a remarkable case of ‘playing possum.’ At the second shot the crocodile rolled over, apparently dead, so that I seized him by the flipper and took a turn about it with a rope.

“He was longer than the boat, but we succeeded after a little trouble in dragging him in by taking out the seat and putting it on his back, literally sitting on the monster. Old Bob managed to use the oars, and, well satisfied, flushed with victory, we moved back in the direction of the yacht.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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“ I think we had gone, perhaps, a mile, and were almost in, when, without warning, the old Indian seemed to rise in the air, falling partly overboard, while the tail of the crocodile came whisking around, knocking oars and grain handles into the air, and just escaping my head. This was but the prelude to other movements, the awakened captive evidently intending to finish the boat. His tail flew a·out like a scythe, and he rolled over and over, carrying confusion with every move. Discretion being the better part of valor in this instance, I retreated to the extreme limit of the rail, where, aided by a resounding blow, I leaped backward into the water, which, fortunately, was shallow, and left our captive in possession. Having driven us out, he calmly clambered over the rail, and sliding into the water, made off. Fortunately the grains or spear was still in his back, so we scrambled into the boat again, and as the line came taut, allowed the crocodile to drag us along; and in this way we soon tired the reptile out. As we hauled him in again and brought his long, black form alongside, he gave a vicious blow at me and nearly knocked old Bob out of the boat the second time; but this was his last caper, as I sent a bullet into his brain. The other two shots, I found, had not seriously injured him, the second one probably stunned him, though I believe him to have been ‘ playing possum,’ a trick they often have. His finely bleached skull now adorns my library.”

## *A Sea-Going Crocodile*

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The Florida crocodile is known to science as *Crocodylus acutus*, and differs materially from the alligator in appearance and in other respects. The principal or most noticeable point is the extremely sharp nose and sharper or more fang-like teeth. The crocodile is to a certain extent marine, as we have seen, while it is doubtful if the alligator ever ventures out to sea.

The true crocodile is found in the island of Hayti, though a different species, and in the swamps and rivers constitutes an important feature of the island life. Many cases are on record of their attacking people. In one instance, a little girl, who had been told that it was dangerous to go near the water after dark, disobeyed the warning and was suddenly seized as she was washing clothes and carried to the bottom, her body being found the next day, partly devoured, while two huge crocodiles were killed near by.

The largest species found here were seen by Humboldt, one measuring seventeen and a half feet, and the other twenty-three feet in length. Such an animal would indeed be a formidable antagonist. "In attacking a person on dry land," writes an English sportsman and naturalist, "they stand erect on the four feet and leap bodily, arching the back like a cat at every jump. A party of priests was out on a picnic on this island, and one having strayed away, the others went home without him. As he did not appear, they returned to look for him, and found him sitting astride the limb of a tree, a crocodile lying

## *Big Game at Sea*

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in the bushes near by patiently awaiting his coming down, after the fashion of a bull. The animal had darted at him suddenly, in bounds covering a surprising distance, and humping its back as described."

The crocodile has a loud and resonant voice, like that of a bull, that is especially unbearable during the breeding season. The females utter a cry like the yelping of a dog, and are very solicitous for and careful of their young, that are much esteemed as articles of diet by the males. The eggs are deposited in rough nests, and are hatched out by the sun. The mother watches the nest zealously, and when the young appear, leads them away to some secluded spot, where, for weeks, she feeds them on half-digested food, after the manner of birds.

The natives sometimes have the temerity to catch crocodiles single-handed, and one colored man in a small town was famous for his exploits. One was that he had mounted a crocodile and rode it by catching it by its fore-flippers, so that it could do nothing but push itself ahead and lunge its muzzle into the sand. Waterton, the English naturalist, distinguished himself by riding a big crocodile up the beach in the same way.

## CHAPTER XXI

### QUEER GAME

**A**NGLERS who wander from one fishing ground to another have many and varied experiences in the pursuit of the game of their choice; it is often the unexpected which happens. I have, in fishing for white sea bass, hooked a sea lion, and played it one brief moment—long enough to remember the sensation; and I have been followed so persistently by seals when trolling that it was impossible to fish; the clever animals took my bait as fast as the trollman put it in, and for a long time I could not see them, so cleverly did they come to the surface to break without being seen. I have had my bait taken by a bald eagle, a gull, a loon, and by various sea birds, when trolling, and doubtless all anglers have had equally strange experiences. Some, which I have heard, are chronicled in the following:

When fishing one season at Avalon Bay, an interesting ribbon or oar-fish was brought in. It was about a foot in length, a rare creature for this part of the world, though at Long Beach, California, a specimen over ten feet long came ashore in 1901.

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An English angler relates his experiences with a large specimen as follows: "I was master of a smack in Loch of Brae some years ago, when one of the hands sang out: 'The net's foul!'

"The smack had been fishing all day, and the men had let the big seine around a school of mackerel, and were slowly hauling it in when something occurred which caused the halt. The mate immediately began to feel around in the big bag for the offender, which was generally a shark, though occasionally porpoises were trapped with the mackerel. In a few minutes the hook fastened upon a shiny object, and slowly a most remarkable fish came into view. As the mate hauled it up he passed its head to the man next to him, who, in turn, passed it along to his neighbor, and so on until the bow of the boat was reached. Then one of the men took the fish by the gills and pulled it aboard.

"Fifteen feet of this curious creature had been passed along like a cable from hand to hand, and still the end did not come. The men were amazed, and their astonishment grew as ten feet more of the silvery body came out of the net, then ten more. Then the end came, and the strange fish was laid out along the deck, reaching from one end of the smack to the other and beyond—a total length of over fifty feet—and a beautiful object in the bright sunlight.

"As long as it was, it was not over fifteen inches in height, and presented the appearance of a satin rib-



**Giant Sun Fish Caught at Avalon. Weight, 1,460 Pounds.**





## Queer Game

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bon. Along the back was a delicate fin, and upon the head a marvelous array of plume-like objects.

"The fish was known to the men as the ribbon-fish, but none of them had seen so large a specimen, one so like a snake; small ones of ten or twelve feet being not uncommon.

"This captive created a revival of the interest in the sea serpent, and it was found upon investigation that a number of ribbon-fishes had been caught in this locality, one being reported as fifty feet in length; but this was not verified. The smack *Sovereign*, owned by Lord Norbury, caught one sixty feet in length, but the men, considering it an uncanny object, cut it up and threw it away. The fish is known to science as *Regalecus banksi*, and in all probability many of the tales of sea monsters may be laid at its door. To illustrate the possibility of this, it may be said that the fish has a singular habit of swimming along at the surface, with its head on or above it, so that the peculiar plume-like objects show. Its motion is an undulatory one, which would give it a snake-like appearance in the water.

"Another *Regalecus* was captured in Northern waters by a vessel in hauling up the anchor. In some way the band-shaped fish had become entangled in the chain, and was hauled to the surface, and fifteen or twenty feet of it taken aboard the vessel by the sailors."

"To be stabbed by a fish is singular," said

## *Big Game at Sea*

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an angler, "but to be shocked by one is still more remarkable. Some years ago, I was visiting a friend on the New England coast, who was interested in natural history, and one day during my stay he asked me to accompany him on a collecting trip. Nearly opposite his house was a little bay, having a clean, sandy bottom, and over it we were soon slowly drifting, my friend using net or spear, as occasion offered, to secure the various animals which took his fancy.

"I sat in the stern, enjoying the day and examining the curious things he brought up, when suddenly I heard a groan and a muttered ejaculation. Looking up, I saw my companion clinging in a seemingly helpless way to the pole, his face ashy pale; indeed, his whole appearance indicated a person stricken with some fatal disease. I sprang forward just in time to catch him as he fell back into the boat, and lowered him upon a seat. At first he could only motion to the water, and I noticed that he was almost rigid and numb. Finally he recovered sufficiently to say 'torpedo,' and then I saw that the harpoon he had been holding was dancing about at a furious rate, evidently having been forced into a large fish. Grasping it, I quickly discovered what had happened to my friend. As soon as I took hold of the pole with both hands I received an electric shock sufficient to almost knock me over, causing me to drop the pole and roll my eyes well, I can assure you. By this time my friend had somewhat recovered, and acting upon his sugges-

## *Queer Game*

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tion, I allowed the fish to remain where it was, and slowly pulled the boat in shore.

“When we grounded upon the beach I took a turn about the line with a cider bottle, which I found, and with this home-made insulator pulled the fish ashore. It was one of the largest torpedoes or electric rays I had ever seen or ever taken, and capable, under certain conditions, of almost killing a human being. It was of an almost oval shape, with a small tail, the side lobes being taken up by the electric organs, which extended from side to side, the ends of the cells being visible from either side.

“When touched, the fish would roll its eyes dismally, utter a low croak, and give what was almost a knock-down shock. No one has ever been killed by one of these fishes, but several people, as in the case of my friend, whose recovery was not complete for a week, have been seriously injured by them.”

The torpedo is one of the rays, and illustrates an extremely interesting phase of the defensive side of life, being provided with a very powerful electric battery capable of benumbing enemies of large size.

“Speaking of queer game,” said another, “reminds me of a singular experience I once had in Japan. I was at the time trying to find out something about the game fishes of Japan, and I found the greatest pleasure among the native fishermen, who employed many and singular devices. There were men who made a specialty of net-fishing,

## *Big Game at Sea*

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others who fished with birds like the Chinese, while others caught shrimps for the markets of the large cities. I was particularly attracted to a firm of crabbers, from the fact that about their fish-house I had found the legs of a crab which must have been a monster in point of size. I questioned one of the crabbers, who said that the creature that had excited my attention was a small one, and I further learned that he not unfrequently caught them. For a consideration, I persuaded him to take me out; and, to my surprise, he informed me that the best time to go crabbing in Japan was by moonlight.

"A few nights later, when the full moon was rising over the water, we pushed off from the beach, the man hoisted his clumsy sail, and away we went down the shore.

"For several miles we followed the beach just beyond the breakers; then, finally, turned into a small bay, from which a great black forest set back, and so ran ashore. As the crabber said we could not fish until the tide was low, I strolled about, to pass away the time, while he lay upon the sands smoking and droning a peculiar song.

"When the moon was well up and the tide had receded, leaving a long stretch of beach bare, the crabber notified me that it was time to begin, and, to my astonishment, handed me a stout cudgel and a piece of rope. I supposed the crabs were taken in the water, but they came up at low tide, he said. I

## *Queer Game*

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was then instructed to take a position at a certain place, upon a rock, about ten feet from the water, and to literally watch and wait, and when anything appeared, to kill it with my cudgel or tie it with the rope.

“ This was not a particularly exciting outlook; but I took my place, and slowly the minutes went by. There was something rather soothing in the murmur of the waves and the rustling of the leaves in the adjacent forest, and I must have dozed or nearly gone to sleep when I was aroused by hearing a curious sound, and on looking up, saw an indistinct object moving along not ten feet away. As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I made out a form that seemed all legs, with a small body; in fact, a big spider it might have been, and then it dawned upon me that this was the crab.

“ My man had gone around a little point, so, hardly knowing what to do, I waited. The crab, for such it was, crawled slowly toward me, passing up the beach, evidently feeding, or at least acting as if it was, and stopping every few moments. It was the most extraordinary spectacle I had ever seen. The body of the creature did not appear larger than my head, but the legs—eight of them—were five feet long, while each of the biting claws was at least ten feet in length. I allowed the animal to pass me, then made a jump in its direction and grasped it by one of the big claws; then, by a quick movement, seized

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the other, and lifted it from the ground. It was light, and came easily; but imagine my feelings when the spider-like creature deliberately threw its claws about me, and fairly squeezed me in its embrace!

"It was not much of a squeeze," said the relator, laughing, "but the idea was so uncanny that I tore the crab away, unfortunately breaking one of the small claws in the struggle. I then threw it down, pressing my knee on its body, and endeavored to tie the big claws; but before I could accomplish it, the small but ivory-like nipper had caught me in the fleshy part of the arm and given me a bite that has left a mark ever since."\*

"Speaking of crabs," said an English angler who was familiar with almost every portion of the globe, "I think the most singular experience it was ever my good fortune to have was on the west coast of Africa. We had traveled in the interior with a government expedition, partly for protection through a bad country and partly for the companionship of some very intelligent men who knew the region well, and who were going down to the coast to meet a sailing vessel which was to take them to another district.

\* This was a most interesting yarn, but the author would advise its details to be well salted before taken. The giant crab of Japan is a fact and specimens as large as described have doubtless been caught, and large specimens may be seen in some of the American museums; but still not professing to know anything about the method of capture, the author would venture the statement that a crab of this kind was never seen wandering over land. Its appearance suggests a life at moderate depths, and there, or possibly in deep water, it is captured by becoming entangled in nets or traps; but if any trained observer has been squeezed by the big crab on dry land by the light of the Japanese moon, the author's apologies are ready.

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“ One day we entered a strip of country that was covered with locusts, and when they rose into the air they almost darkened the sun, giving it a dull coppery hue. We fairly waded through locusts, and that night came to the seashore to find that the dead locusts were piled up on the beach by the waves in a perfect wall for miles. They had flown out to sea, blown by the wind, and been washed in by the waves. The odor was sickening, and to escape it we traveled for miles down the beach before we made our camp, and here it was that the singular experience occurred. We noticed almost immediately that the white sandy beach was fairly riddled with the burrows of a large land-crab that was the most rapid runner I had ever seen. Some of the naturalists wished to capture some, so a hunt was begun, and by mere accident several of the party were on horseback.

“ The crabs would not always take to their holes, and one chased by me ran up the beach on the hard sand. The crab ran like a streak of light for almost a hundred yards, and I had great difficulty in catching up with it; when I did, and reached down to strike it with a bamboo, it stopped, then ran as rapidly back in a direct line, while my horse went on and lost twenty feet in the turn, and by the time I had wheeled about, the crab had scurried far ahead and was at the mouth of its den, dodging in as I came up.

“ Another crab was started, giving me a zig-zag race, actually tiring the horse out by the sudden and

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erratic turns that were necessary to keep up with it, reminding me of a game of polo; and, finally, just as I would stoop to strike the creature, it would dash into its hole.

“The agility of the crabs was marvelous, and it was soon evident that to run them down was an impossibility; so the running was sport, and every morning a race with the crabs was had in the saddle as exercise. I believe I should not be overstepping the bounds of truth if I should say that the crabs entered into the spirit of the thing, and gave us a race as though they enjoyed it. We finally captured one by digging it out—an arduous operation under a tropical sun.”

The land crabs, especially those known as *Ocypoda*, on our own shores, are remarkable for their agility. In Florida they are called spirit crabs, because of their ability to avoid the hunter and their resemblance to the white sand. They have a peculiar method of running, scampering away over the beach, then when almost caught turning quickly and running in a directly opposite direction, then zig-zagging so rapidly that in attempting to catch them I have often been completely nonplussed and obliged to acknowledge that they could not be taken on the open beach.

On rocky places another very rapid crab, the *Grap-sus*, is found; a bright-red fellow, watchful and equally difficult to capture, often giving the pursuer a hard run before overtaken. These crabs at the





Angel Fish Taken with Rod and Reel



## *Queer Game*

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island of Tristan da Cunha have been seen carrying off small birds; and at other islands rabbits have been caught by them, showing that they are the hunters of the tribe.

“Regarding the myths and romances of the sea,” said an angler, “it is very easy to see where they all arise. As an example, take the unicorn in the English coat of arms; there is no doubt at all but that this is a distorted narwhal, which, to my mind, is quite as remarkable as the supposed unicorn.

“The latter was supposed to be a horse with fins or webbed feet, possessing a horn that projected from the forehead several feet. This animal plowed the ocean in olden times, and, according to old histories, was a common sight. It was, in reality, the creation of some scientist, who had heard the unicorn described by a sailor. It looked like a horse, and from the forehead extended a long horn, a terrible weapon that no man or fish could front.

“The sailor had seen a narwhal, a small whale with a rounded forehead, from which projected a remarkable spiral horn, and sometimes two. No wonder the old seamen were astonished. The present unicorn is nearer the actual truth than one might expect, considering the times and the ignorance regarding natural history.

“Some years ago,” continued the speaker, “I was in the North Atlantic on a government vessel. We went up to Iceland around the coast of Newfound-

## *Big Game at Sea*

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land, and while in this region I saw more or less of the famous unicorn, or narwhal. We were stopping at a native village where there was a large shark factory; the meat was known as *spec*, and, in reality, was the money of the country, or a medium of exchange.

“The sharks here were very large and were caught in deep water. Being somewhat curious to see the method of capture, I asked one of the men to take me out, which, for a consideration, he agreed to do. The boat, or canoe, we went in was a huge arrangement made of skins and whalebone, and fitted with bone spears of all kinds for the capture of big game. It took three men to manage the boat, while a boy, the son of the owner, steered.

“The shark-fishing grounds were about five miles off shore, and, as the wind was light, the men pulled. We had gone nearly a mile, I think, when the boy at the helm gave a loud grunt, the only sound that had been made, and pointed up the coast. Following the direction indicated, I saw what appeared to be the heads of several men on the surface of the calm water. The natives, lethargic enough at any time, seemed to be excited, and immediately turned the boat in that direction and began to pull with all their energy, the boy helping along by bending his body, as man-of-war’s men often do in a race.

“We soon came up to the place and saw the curious heads projecting from the water ahead. One of the men put his oar away and took up a harpoon, and

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silently the boat moved on. I now could see that the animals were not seals, but cetaceans of some kind. Suddenly there came a flash, and as one of the creatures dashed out of the water, I saw that it was a veritable unicorn, so far as the horn was concerned, as from the head projected a long blade or tusk. The sight appeared to spur the men on to greater exertions, and, in a moment, we were in the midst of a mass of boiling heads and tails. I knew what the buck fever was from personal experience with a moose; but I certainly never experienced the feeling that came over me as the animals darted this way and that about us. Suddenly a large horn gleamed by our side; the next instant the harpoon was plunged into its owner, and we were deluged with foam from the big animal that rose high in air. It must have sounded, as whales do, going directly to the bottom with a rush that made the gunwale of the boat smoke. Again it went down, the coils of rope fairly leaping from the box; then came a stop, and the men hastened to take in the slack, coiling it back with marvellous rapidity. The animal had to rise to breathe, and soon an enormous white ivory tusk shot out of the water not a foot from the bow. Then came a curious performance: for a moment the narwhal seemed to fairly balance, and then the boy, seeing the long tusk so near, grasped it and was jerked off his feet. For a second he clung to the horn as one would to a flagstaff, then was dashed into the water and run

## *Big Game at Sea*

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over in the mad rush of the animal that now dashed away in a lateral direction. The boy was picked up in a half-drowned condition, cuffed, and tossed into the bottom of the boat; not a moment too soon, as the line exhausted again brought up with a jerk, and away went the boat in a wild race over the seas.

“ It was now merely a question of endurance, and directing us all to sit in the stern so that the bow of the canoe was well out of the water, the harpooner sat and held the line in place. For a mile, nearly, the game animal tore through the water without showing signs of fatigue, then it began slowly to abate its pace, so that the men ventured to take hold of the line and haul in. Slow work it was. Every pull the animal seemed to resent with fierce bursts of speed; darting this way and that, leaping from the water, turning over and over, trying in every way to escape the terrible weapon that held it. Escape, however, was impossible, and slowly the line came in, until finally the animal was alongside and landed. A beautiful creature it was, a narwhal of the largest size, nearly fifteen feet long; of a dark spotted color, making it a striking object as it rolled about in the water. The horn of the narwhal was a spiral piece of ivory eight feet in length, and was in reality a tusk or tooth protruding from the left side of the upper jaw. The narwhal is a whale, losing its teeth early, this tusk, and sometimes two, being preserved. As far as known, there is not the slightest use for the strange

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tusk; it is possible that it is used as a weapon, though this is unlikely."

"I have seen a rival of the narwhal in the Indian Ocean twenty feet in length," interrupted a listener. "It happened this way: I was bound down the Madagascar coast in a trip to South Africa, and was sitting on the quarter-deck with the captain, and had just made the remark that there was not a sail in sight, when I chanced to turn my eyes back to where I had been looking, and there, coursing along, was a sail. For a second I thought I must be laboring under a delusion; but the captain also saw it and called for his glass. It was a leg of mutton sail, apparently on a long boat a mile away, or perhaps more, and, the strangest part of it, was moving along as if propelled by a stiff breeze, while we could distinctly see that there was no wind within sight. By this time the native part of the crew had seen the stranger and were gathering at the rail, talking to each other in a mysterious way, while occasionally one would throw his hands or arms upward. The sail, when first observed, was passing to our left, but soon hauled on what must have been the wind and came directly for us.

"There was something extremely uncanny in it all, and it was easy to see that the men, a superstitious lot, were ill at ease. The captain, after looking at the object through the glass, handed it to me with the remark that, if it was a boat, she was sailing hull

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under. A second later and I had it under view myself, and a more astonishing object had never presented itself to me. The sail was still visible, and I thought I could make out the mast; but as for the hull, there was none, nothing but a ripple appearing where the sail apparently joined the surface.

“ On it came, however, rapidly increasing its speed, until finally, when within one hundred yards of the quarter, its true nature was appreciated. It was a fish, one of those monsters of the deep rarely seen—a gigantic swordfish over twenty feet in length, with a dorsal fin rising five or eight feet from the back, presenting the appearance of a leg-of-mutton sail, colored brilliantly and flashing and scintillating in the sunlight; a truly magnificent spectacle as it moved along. It was the sail-fish of the Indian Ocean, famed as being the king of the swordfishes and for its huge, sail-like dorsal; and, as I found later, considered by the natives as of a spiritual nature, or rather as having the faculty of changing itself into a boat under full sail. Its presence was looked upon as a bad omen or indicative of a coming storm; but, as it happened in this case, it came after the storm, so may be said to have brought us good luck, or at least fair weather.

“ The sail-fish, or *Histiophorus*, as it is known to science, is found in the Indian Ocean, and competent authorities state that it has been known to attain a length of at least thirty feet, and being armed with a sword of great strength and size, it is no mean



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antagonist. Few native fishermen have the temerity to attack this monster; in fact, they avoid it; but a few years ago, at Ceylon, a crew was employed to capture one in the interest of an English collector of museum curiosities. A long native boat was used, which held ten or fifteen men, and an old native, whose reputation as a harpooner had been established after many a conflict with the denizens of the deep, was placed in charge, the Englishman being the only white man in the party.

“Even in this locality the sail-fish was a comparative rarity, but rumors had been afloat for some time that a fine specimen had been seen a dozen miles up the coast at a small fishing village. In a few hours the place was reached, just at nightfall, as it happened, the party finding accommodations on shore, the men in the huts of the fishermen and the white man in a poor hotel.

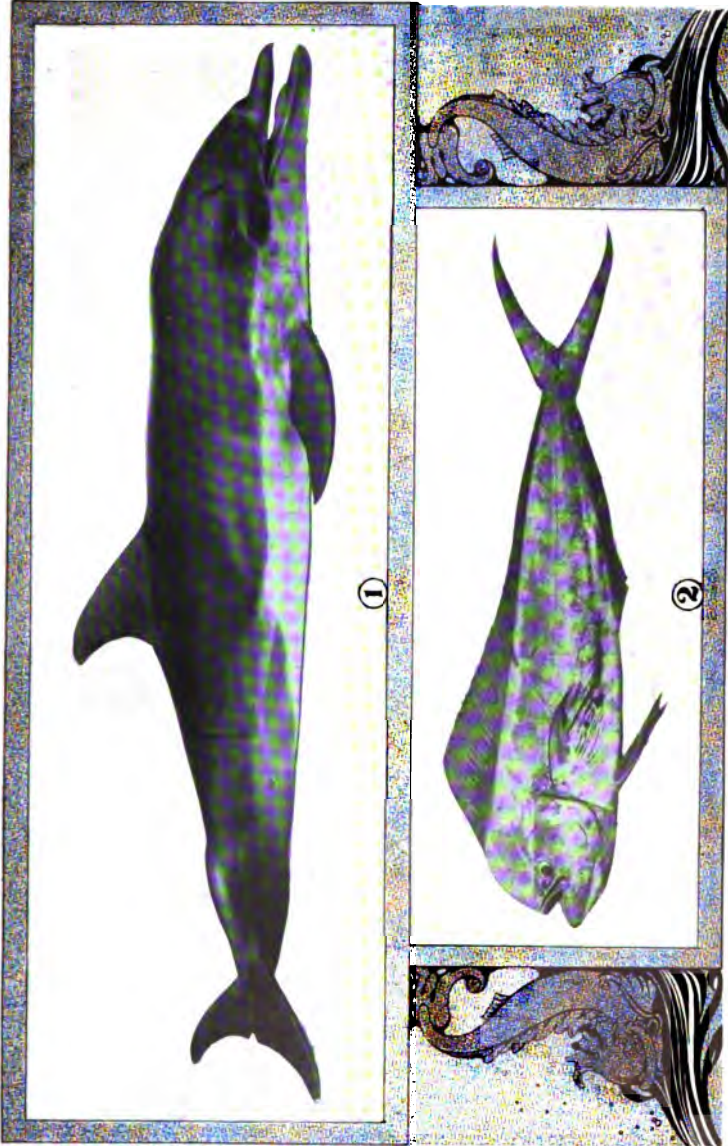
“Stories about the ferocity of the great fish were in every mouth, and had they all been taken literally it is doubtful if the purposes of the expedition would have been carried out. A tall, olive-colored lascar was mourning the loss of his boat—the great fish had completely wrecked it—and stated that he narrowly escaped with his life. Another native claimed that the fish was a magician and had charmed the coast, roaming up and down and waging warfare against all who dared to venture upon his domain. Still another volunteered the information that the great

## *Big Game at Sea*

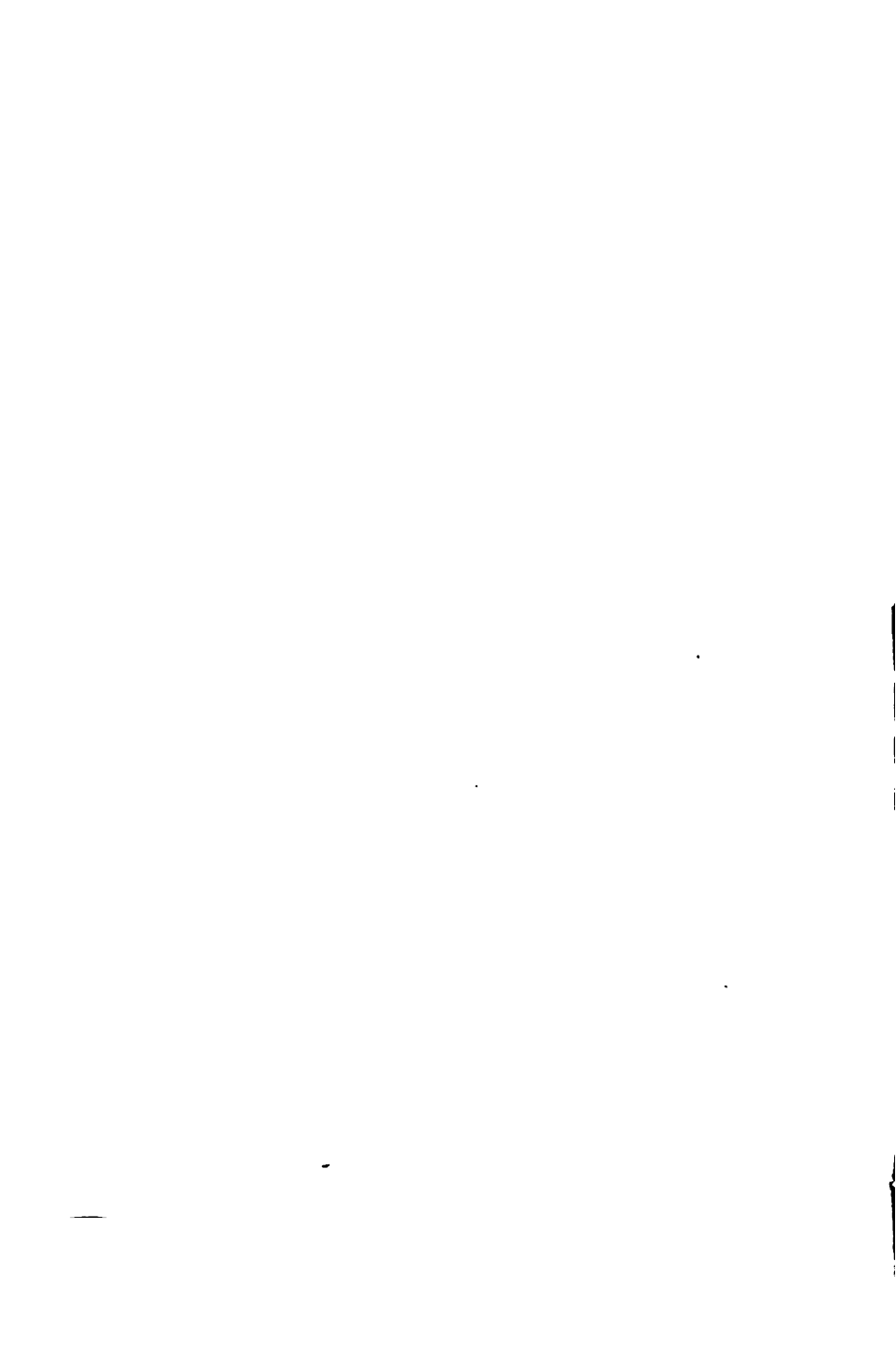
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fish could leave what was presumably its native element and roam about the land in the shape of a white elephant. Such tales were not reassuring to the native crew, and not a few refused to start, so that when the boat put off on the following day it was seriously short-handed.

“ The sail-fish had been seen but a few days before, dashing across the waters of a small bay, presumably in chase of schools of fish that at this season sought the seclusion the inlets and bays afforded, and for this place the boat was directed, the natives singing a mournful chant, hoping, perhaps, in this way to appease its rage. For several hours they rowed this way and that, the lookout standing on a short mast, ready to give the signal. Occasionally a porpoise or some large fish would dash into the air and create a momentary excitement. It was after several of these false alarms that the Englishman took his stand on the lookout. The water was nearly smooth, here and there a ripple being seen, caused by a school of fish, when suddenly, among the small fry, there appeared a sharp, knife-like fin. It was merely a shark, perhaps, or a great horse-mackerel, chasing the small fry; but no shark had such a fin. It was rising every second, and was soon two feet out of water. Up it came, glistening, gleaming in the sunlight, and the looker-on was so fascinated and spellbound with the curious apparition that not until a shout came from the crew did he realize that they were there to do



(1) Bottle-nosed Dolphin Taken with Rod and Reel. (2) Dolphin Taken with Rod and Reel at Santa Catalina Islands.



## *Queer Game*

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more than look. The big fish was at hand, had thrown down the gauntlet, and they were to take it up.

“As the great fin rose higher and higher, the speed of the animal seemed to decrease, and it appeared to be indulging in a sun bath or displaying the gorgeous hues of its dorsal appendage. Slowly it came on; a slight turn of the oar, and the boat was placed in the same general position, heading in the direction in which it was moving. A glance about the crew and boat showed everything trim and ship-shape. The harpooner held his weapon firmly; the long rope was coiled in the tub and clear, a native crouching behind, armed with a knife, ready to cut if danger threatened; the rest of the men sat at their oars, awaiting orders, stoical, as was their nature. On came the fin, now high out of water, cutting deftly and waving with a gentle undulating motion. Nearer it crept, so close, that surely it must hear the compressed breathing of the men. Then rose a dark form, a steel gleamed for a second in the sunlight, a flash, a thud, and an enormous form seemed to shoot upward from the ocean, falling with a roar and crash; the boat was almost covered with foam, and the line rushed from the tub, making the woodwork smoke.

“‘Well done!’ shouted the white man, ‘but for Allah’s sake, stand clear the line—if it fouls but an inch, cut. Now, then, lads!’ he continued, ‘give way!’ And under the strong efforts of the rowers,

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the canoe shot ahead after the fleeing fish. The rope was running out so swiftly that it would probably have broken when the end came, had not this precaution been taken; as it was, when it was all exhausted, the jerk of the fish buried the bow in foam; the man sprang aft, and a second later the craft was bounding after the stricken fish.

“ For nearly half an hour this race was kept up, and then the game showing some signs of exhaustion, the rope was manned, and an attempt made to gain upon it and take in the slack. At first it seemed to spur the fish into renewed efforts, but finally they began to gain and could see the monster ahead.

“ ‘ He has stopped! ’ shouted the harpooner, suddenly, after a few moments of hard pulling. ‘ Take in quick! ’ said the Englishman; ‘ perhaps he is sinking. ’ Then a movement from the bow man attracted his attention. The latter was evidently dumb with terror and could only point, and there, coming on with the celerity of light, was the great fish, its fin fairly whistling through the water. ‘ Leap for your lives! ’ shouted the Englishman, hoarsely, and as the men dashed over, the frail craft rose from the water as if shot from a catapult, pierced by the great fish, and fell back a shattered wreck, a precarious refuge for the men. They swam about it holding on in terror, expecting momentarily to be run through by the giant swordsman, and in this condition were finally picked up by some fishermen. The sail-fish had in

## Queer Game

some way broken the line, and, seeing its supposed enemy, had, after the fashion of its kind, charged it, so becoming the conqueror in the sea-fight."

As remarkable a story as this appears to be, it is exceeded by an account given by Colonel Nicholas Pike, late consul to Mauritius, who describes the leap of one of these large swordfishes through the sail of a native boat.

## CHAPTER XXII

### OFF THE SIERRA SANTA CRUZ

**Y**OU might search some maps all day and not find the name Soquel, but this is the fault of the map-makers. Soquel is a little town along the Coast Range near the Bay of Monterey in California; a hamlet of cool winds, fragrant rose gardens, of fields of grain reaching up to splendid forests of redwood which form the sky lines everywhere alongshore back into the Santa Cruz range as far as the eye can reach. Among the verse of David Starr Jordan one particular poem, which he has called "Vivérois" has always had a fascination for me, and with his permission I quote the following:

"Beyond the sea, I know not where,  
There is a town called Vivérois;  
I know not if 'tis near or far,  
I know not what its features are,  
I only know 'tis Vivérois.

"I know not if its ancient walls  
By vine and moss be overgrown;  
I know not if the night-owl calls  
From feudal battlements of stone,  
Inhabited by him alone.



## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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" I know not if 'mid meadow-lands  
Knee-deep in corn stands Vivérois;  
I know not if prosperity  
Has robbed its life of poesy;  
That could not be in Vivérois,  
They would not call it Vivérois.

" Perchance upon its terraced heights  
The grapes grow purple in the sun;  
Or down its wild untrodden crags,  
Its broken cliffs and frost-bit jags  
The mountain-brooks unfettered run.

" Perchance among the clouds it lies,  
'Mid vapors out from Dreamland blown;  
Built up from vague remembrances,  
That never yet had form in stone,  
Its castles built of cloud alone."

I have always had a Vivérois in my mind; some fair and beautiful spot always just ahead. I fully expected to find it in the Laurentides where the green reaches of the mountains come down to the St. Lawrence between Quebec and the Saguenay. Perhaps you remember the deep and splendid blue tints that lie like bars of tourmaline, or old Persian turquoise in these valleys along shore. No deeper blue, no more splendid tint ever met the human eye than these, but as I advanced they slowly stole on and were always just so far ahead, and then fell in behind, glowing, inviting, realistic, unapproachable.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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So I fancy is Vivérois, but in Soquel when I first saw it one bright afternoon I imagined I had found a Vivérois; yet now as I look down upon it from the hills I cannot say why; it caught my fancy, that was all; not Soquel alone, but the valley of Soquel, for there is a valley, a town and a little river; indeed the real Soquel of my fancy is a combination of all these. First there is the valley or the cañon that reaches back from the bay five, six, perhaps ten miles; very straight for a California cañon, really two great arms of the Santa Cruz range, which come creeping down to the sea that piles in onto the sands of *Laguna del Soquel*, and against the cliffs in such a melodious way that five miles up the cañon you may hear its roar. This is due to some peculiar carrying quality of the air, which intensifies the sound, as often when going down the river I have heard the ominous roar of the sea sighing through the meadows and woods, fancied that a heavy gale was on, imagined great seas, storm and disaster; yet, when I reached the shore the sea was a disk of steel extending away to the distant mountains of Monterey.

It is well perhaps that you cannot ask me wherein lay the real charm of Soquel as I should be embarrassed. Indeed I never stopped there; I was always going through, or wading down the little river, the real Soquel; but there is a Soquel with tangles of roses, a peculiar quality of air, cool, rich, pure, vibrant, velvet-like on the cheek. I remember a score



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(1) Spiny Lobster (Crawfish). (2) Blue-eyed Perch.



## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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of houses rose-clad, with a strange assortment of trees; figs, chestnuts, oranges, acacias, eucalyptus, madrone, apples, tremendous antipodal opposites, cheek by jowl; little churches, an ancient inn with inviting yard reaching away from the well-watered country road, fields of pink and lavender, real fields of the cloth of gold that waved and rippled in the wind in ever-changing tints and combinations of color; a neglected field of mustard, wild carrot and vagrant weeds, if you will; a mountain Gobelin of the fields, irresistible, alluring.

Then there was the river, and perhaps this was the charm after all; a little river that demanded tribute, as you could not reach the sea without crossing it, and from its mouth at the laguna back into the range it was flanked as is no river in all the world outside of California, a solid wall of redwood rising, the very gods of the forest, pillars that seemed to support the sky.

The Soquel is a winding stream, yet it never strayed very far from the trees, and as I followed it down they were always in sight, gradually disappearing as I came to the sea where the little laguna widens out and sea and mountain stream join forces and form shelter for the steel head as it did for the salmon in other days.

Usually when one goes fishing he is on the ground, but it was my fancy to make this a pilgrimage, so I slept five miles up the Soquel, on its banks, one

## *Big Game at Sea*

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might say, yet one hundred feet above it, and not beyond the music of its voice, the ranch house facing the splendid range and seemingly a score of miles from any sea. Yet, in just thirty minutes I could reach the wharf at the seashore and find my boatman waiting to take me out after the salmon of the Bay of Monterey.

Country and ocean are rarely so charmingly combined, so completely in contradiction. Quail run before the team; the roadrunner crosses the road, and I catch sight of an eagle soaring high above the giant redwoods, see the rainbow trout dashing aside as we rumble over the little bridge, and presto! I am unreeling and "Doc Hamilton," my boatman, is telling me of the ten salmon averaging thirty-two and a half pounds apiece, or three hundred and twenty pounds in all, which Mr. Someone of Somewhere, not of Vivérois or Soquel I swear, took with him yesterday and which, had I been there I might have caught. I feel guilty and am afraid that "Doc" will perceive it, and I wonder what he would say if he knew that I had spent the whole day on the Soquel looking at the mountains and dreaming. I am relieved when he does not press the matter. He has an abundance of bait—gleaming anchovies caught by the light of the moon, and taking the oars he stands, facing the bow, and with powerful strokes sends the double ender out into the bay.

Perhaps you have never fished for salmon in Mon-

## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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terey, and do not know its many charms. Let it be known, then, that it is August, and that it is always cool. The hot days are apparently unknown here; the air has a peculiar quality altogether delightful and the sea or bay in summer is often as smooth as glass all night, and until midday when the so-called "trade," the inshore, wind begins, increases until it often creates a heavy sea; but by that time you are in and your salmon are on the wharf. The bay is fifty miles long, really an open roadstead, after the fashion of nearly all the harbors made by nature in California. The Presidio of Monterey is at one end, Santa Cruz and Capitola, near the mouth of the Soquel, at the other; the latter being five miles to the west of Santa Cruz, and being more in the lee, appears to be the favorite point of departure. Here the Soquel has broken down the cliffs which characterize the coast. A long wharf reaches out, and in its lee lie numbers of picturesque lateen-rigged boats, launches and smaller craft for the diversion and use of the anglers; and every morning at five or six they are lining up off the float to receive their patrons from all over the country.

There is a fog bank out at sea, but the high mountains of Monterey and Carmel stand up clear and distinct across the bay. The water is as smooth as the proverbial crystal, and one thinks of the painted ship and the time of the Ancient Mariner. If you are a tenderfoot your boatman will unfold the mysteries of

## *Big Game at Sea*

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the salmon, surely the fish of mystery which is here in vast bands feeding on schools of anchovy to later go up the rivers to spawn and die.

Once clear of the kelp bed and shallow water that is tinged red in patches with the clouds of *Peridinium*, the most remarkable of all the small phosphorescent animals, my boatman prepared his tackle, and I mine. He had a heavy cord line, with loops every twenty or thirty feet and sinkers of lead ranging from a few ounces to several pounds. The heavy sinker was attached twenty feet from the hook, which was cleverly baited with a large three-inch anchovy. I noticed that he inserted the hook through the eyes, hauled it through, then passed the point through the mouth and down through the body coming out near the tail; the line formed a loop around the jaws of the bait, preventing them from opening, thus stopping the whirling of the bait. A two-pound sinker was attached twenty feet from the bait, and the seemingly incongruous mechanism lowered to lure the game fish of the world, if authorities are to be considered.

At intervals on his line he had marks at two, five or ten fathoms, and the secret of the fishing was to find how deep the fish were lying, and then go for them. "Doc" tried a depth of fifty feet at first and was encouraged when passing a boat whose owner pointed downward, which meant "deep fish." This was too suggestive of cod fishing for me, and I used



## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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my rod and reel with a twenty-one thread line and pipe sinker, which took it down possibly twenty feet. I dwell upon the *modus operandi* or statistics of this sport, as to me, at least, it was very singular.

In Scotland, in Eastern Canada, the salmon requires the most æsthetic lure the fly-maker can conceive, and skill on the part of the angler; yet here the splendid fish, a near kinsman, a cousin german, was to be taken literally with a mechanism of the grossest kind, though it should be remembered that the method was that of the market fishermen.

It was a fascinating sight, twenty or thirty boats and strange crafts, launches with engines in the best place down astern, rowboats, Americanized Latin double enders, suggestive of Naples, small craft rowed by anglers, their wives astern holding the rod, and far away on the skyline where it blended with the blue ineffable haze of the coast range the picturesque lateen sails of Italian trollers.

We were four or five miles off shore when a shout came from a pirate with six lines, each held by a rancher from San Joaquin or Santa Clara. "There you are," said "Doc." "Those blasted haymakers, who never saw a salmon outside of a can, come out and take the record fish," as with a shout the rancher, who was having the time of his life, brought a great bar of quivering silver to the surface after a mighty struggle and the boatman involved it in the big scoop net and lifted it aboard. The wedge of possible

## *Big Game at Sea*

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envy was coming over the rail when my rod bent, a soft, strange (to me) something struck it, the line rushed away and I hooked my fish. I was anxious to compare the play of the salmon to other fishes I had taken, so held it with a taut line and took my time, while "Doc" adjured me by all the gods, to "snake him in."

The fish made a splendid run, sweeping upward with a vigor that sent waves of tingling thrills up line and rod into every fiber; this I conceive to be the moment of complete fascination in angling, after the first run when you stop the fish and hold it a second that you may feel its strength, watch the temper of bending rod and taut line; and this is where I made a palpable mistake. I felt a strange hammering on the line, distinct, pronounced, as though the fish was deliberately jerking its head from side to side, as I have often seen a tarpon do in air. I am advised by "Doc" that I should have reeled and reeled hard, as the hammering only widened the hole in the salmon's jaw, and the next slack the fish got, it threw out the hook.

This is what happened. I played that large and splendid fish a few short moments, saw it bounding upward, almost anticipated its leap as the water boiled on the surface twenty yards away, and then—tell it not in Gath!—there was a sense of goneness.

"It's all off," said "Doc," sententiously. A wild cheer rose from another handliner on the launch, as

## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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another big salmon was lifted in. At this precise moment I fell from grace. "Doc" baited my line and I unreeled my fine tackle again, and getting the butt of my rod under my leg held it in my left hand. The handline was temptingly near; it required but a reach of an inch or two, and in some way my fingers closed over it.

"Doc" recognized the diminished strain, and remarked that now "I was getting down to business," and at that moment on that combination battering ram and juggernaut-like tackle, I had a strike. "Doc" seized my rod, while I bent to the work of landing my first salmon. I had fished for red grouper, red snapper, cod and halibut with a handline, but these were deep-sea fish and could, as a rule, be caught in no other way, and the game was legitimate, but here was a splendid fish which was liable to be caught anywhere on the surface or in the deeps, and I confess that I felt the culprit in murdering the game in so base a fashion. Still I played it, and admit that the salmon gave a splendid fight, despite the fact that it had no chance. It tore the heavy line through my fingers with a rush and hiss that told of a big fish, and could easily have broken the line; then it came rushing upward with tremulous bounds, broke water fifty feet away, came in at me with a dash that ought to have been cheered, swept about the boat in a circle, always coming in, as I gave no slack even where it was making the heaviest rushes, a game

## *Big Game at Sea*

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fish of the first quality. Soon I had it near the boat and called for the net.

"Why," said "Doc," "he hain't found out he's hooked yet; look out for him!"

This was true. The fish came alongside, apparently saw me or the boat and made a rush that caused everything to burn and tingle, made a sound of twenty fathoms that was irresistible and began a series of plays, rushes and runs that satisfied me of the splendid qualities of the salmon while at sea. Such a fish on a rod would have been the perfection of angling. I handled him as daintily as I could, and soon saw the gleam of silver, a flash of light in the rich green water, brought him to the quarter and watched the splendid play of silver, as surely no fish gleams so brightly except the tarpon, and then led the game into the wide open net which "Doc" handled with skill; there was at least this redeeming clause in the catch. The salmon tossed the water over us bravely, doused us well, and having received a merciful quietus came in as fine a salmon, in the neighborhood of twenty-six pounds, as one would wish to see.

I was willing to concede that even on the handline it was sport of a certain quality, though not for me, as I confess to a certain unreasonableness regarding light tackle along with other lapses.

By this time twenty salmon had been taken by the various boats, and a man in a launch, who was fishing

## Off the Sierra Santa Cruz

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with a rod and heavy sinker, landed one; but I could not conceive the difference between this and the handline.

Coursing, wheeling in every direction, the boats went, always looking for this silver *ignis fatuus* that was down somewhere, and every boat which passed within hailing distance exchanged signals.

“How deep? Ten fathoms, or twenty out?”

Then “Doc” would adjust his line to the new conditions, and so on the handline, always the handline, I would have a strike and play the dashing band of silver in its countless rushes in and out.

I confess to what may be an unreasonable prejudice against the handline, and wishing to be perfectly fair, concede that to any one who enjoys handline fishing here was the sport of sports; and that it is enjoyed at Santa Cruz, Capitola and Monterey is shown by the fact that hundreds flock to these shores and enjoy it, and, strange to say, they get nearly all the fish, the rod catches being in the minority. Doubtless if every one fished with a rod, to give the game a square deal, as they do in Southern California, the result would be different.

The water was still smooth, yet a ground swell was coming in out of the west, telling of storms at sea, and on the crest of the waves rode the fairy-like physalia, and under the surface countless and gigantic jelly fishes with amber and deep chocolate and lavender radiations. Some with tentacles twenty or thirty

## *Big Game at Sea*

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feet in length, like gigantic comets; others, in white and pink, were mere disks, while countless minute forms filled the water of this bay, famed for its wealth of life of strange and incongruous diversity. Huge black spots here and there told of schools of anchovies, and up through them occasionally came forty or fifty-foot sulphur bottom whales, while over the sea flew countless flocks of sea pigeons, also preying upon them, covering the green waters for acres; and when they rose with a rippling roar, like the beating of a thousand waves, the air was filled with the disagreeable musky odor; not so disagreeable perhaps as the odor of the whale which filled the air with spray just to the windward.

The eye of the angler is constantly regaled with marvelous sights in this paradise of animal life.

The boatman has turned to the east, and we are going in shore before the big swells which are coming from nowhere and growing larger and larger. I see a big long-tailed gull chasing the sea pigeons, forcing them to stand and deliver, and then, the rod bends and the big reel is a witness to its own undoing; no salmon this. I could stop this silver king of Monterey in a few seconds, but this is another matter. It rips the line off by the yard, literally makes things sing, and a fine leather spray rises about the thumb brake. Away and down it goes, while the reel sings an acclaim of its own; down deep into the cañon, that is supposed to be beneath us, then up, rising in a long,

well-sustained bound. I stop it, as it reaches the surface, where it whirls about, beating the water into foam and for a moment blazes on the side of a big roller, then is off, surging down, bending the stout rod to the buckling point, stretching the line until it twangs like a guitar string.

Then I had it all my way, and again stop for the grand rush which makes even the stolid "Doc" say "Gee whiz!" then have it on the flank and watch its splendid play, breathless, as it is work, this pumping, holding, playing, slacking, reeling, all at just the right time; work that makes the veins stand out, the heart pump and the boatman smile, as he is paid not to do it, for that day at least. In it comes, perhaps a salmon. "Doc" thinks it a thirty-six-pounder, but I am a skeptic; I know those splendid runs, those strong leaps up from depths to the surface, those splendid sweeps around, and I wager with myself, taking heavy odds, that it is a white sea bass.

As I bring it to the quarter and for a moment catch a glimpse of the fish I see that I am right. It is a cousin of the great bass of the south, more slender, and what the southern fishermen call a sea trout; a splendid fellow, full of fight from start to finish, and as he comes in, bearing off heavily, he has me breathing hard, and just to show that he can do it, despite all my strength, breaks away and is off one hundred feet to be slowly reeled in again. So comes this fighter to the net, and when I turn him in and the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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boatman successfully nets him, for there is no gaffing here, he tosses the water over us in a royal fashion, coming in with a decided protest.

I can imagine no more attractive catch than this on an eight- or nine-ounce tip with a number-nine line, and as the boatman holds it up, I see a fish four feet and a half long, thirty pounds in weight at least, with the graceful shape of the weakfish, bronzed iridescent with pink and old-gold hues on its upper surface, gray and silver below, and about the head, the marvelous tints of the peacock. Such a catch in olden times would have been sent to the emperor and all the great men of the city summoned to the feast.

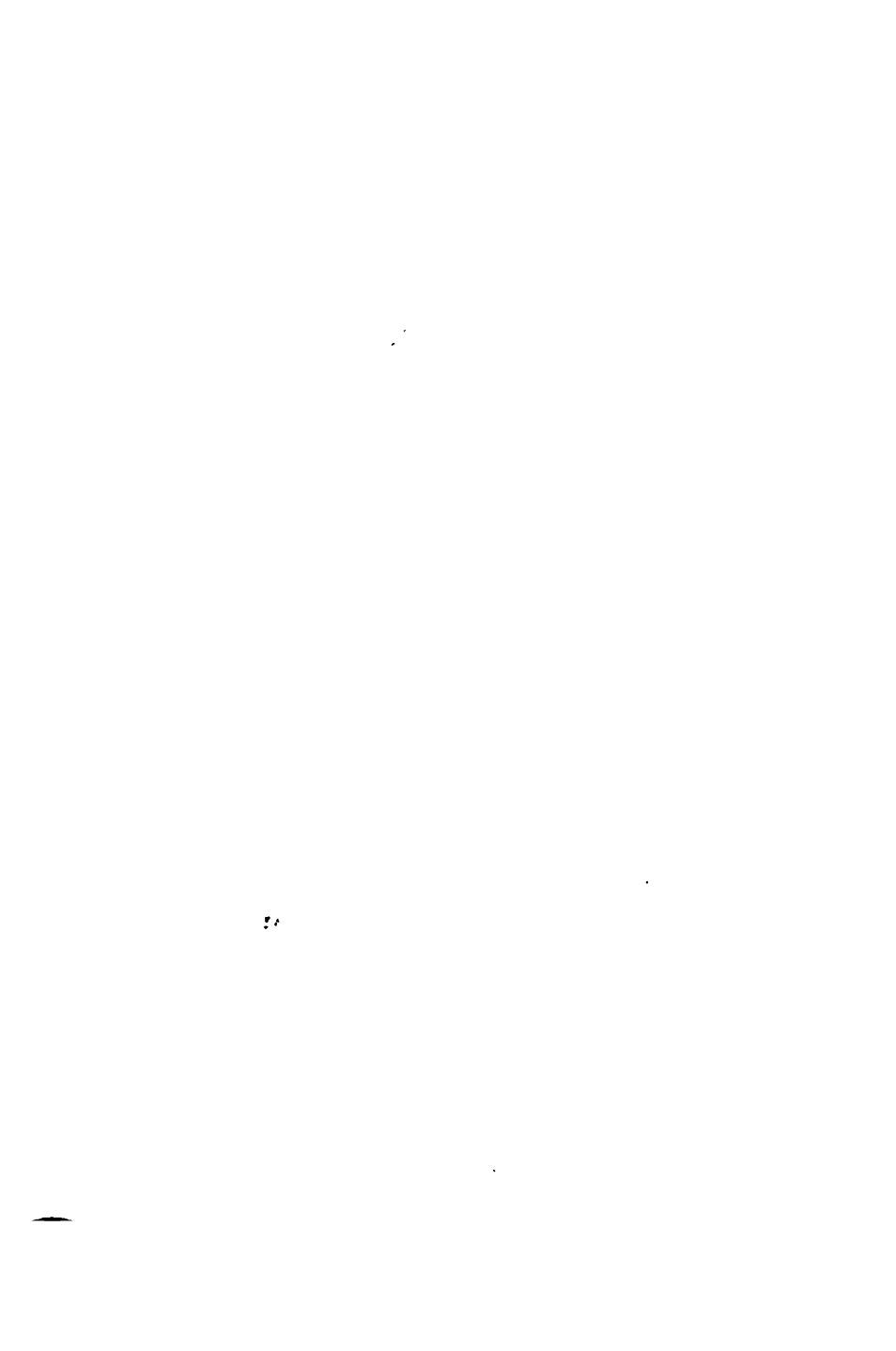
But what are the facts on this twentieth day of August, in the year of our Lord, 1906? We are slightly disappointed; it is salmon that we are out for, and if the truth is told these fish are so plentiful that they interfere with the real game. We do not want them, yet if one such fish was caught at any point on the Atlantic coast it would be heralded far and near, photographed and mounted. The launches on this happy day in the Bay of Monterey brought in at least thirty of these hard and splendid fighters, ranging from thirty to fifty pounds in weight; and that morning on the wharf I saw at least half a ton of them, some sixty and seventy pounds in weight; brought in by the lateen-rigged boats, having been trapped in gill-nets at night; and this is repeated from April until October.





(1) Giant Star Fish.  
 (2) Sea Anemones.

(3) The Blacksmith Fish.  
 (4) A Meteor of the Sea (light giver).



## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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We had struck a school of "sea trout," and another fish came in on the hand-line, making the welkin ring, tossing spume into the air as it came to the net. Then the rod came in action again, hooked another trout, to be followed by a salmon on the hand-line, that made a fine fight for liberty and life. Luck was against me.

I hooked and landed another salmon on the big line, but large sea trout only fell to my rod, nor during my stay here did I succeed, though I tried various schemes to obviate the use of the big sinker. But the fish were down to the twenty fathom mark, for reasons best known to themselves. On days when I was not out, they were at the surface, and I *saw* a man who took a number with his rod. At Monterey and Carmel many anglers take them in this way. I believe my jovial boatman spent part of his time ashore hunting up gentlemen who had killed large salmon with the rod, as every time I visited the beach from the ranch up the country I was introduced to a Mr. Blank, who that morning had taken a forty-pounder with the rod, or a Mr. Someone else regaled me with a tale to the effect that he had found the salmon on the surface and trolled for them as he would bluefish or yellowtail, and took two monsters. Indeed I saw them do it; yet when I fish it is "twenty fathom, Bill." Some day I shall go to these happy hunting-grounds and camp on the trail of the salmon all summer and land my game with rod and reel.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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The movements of the Monterey salmon are more or less uncertain. They are scheduled to appear in April, and generally do, and they remain, as a rule, until the first heavy storm in winter; and as some of my catches were filled with nearly ripe eggs it is evident that they were soon to enter some river not far away, as the Sacramento, or Russian, and were feeding high in the interim; the vast schools of sardines and anchovies affording an omnipresent feast, and in such vast numbers that it was a miracle that a salmon could be induced to take a dead fish on a hook.

As midday approaches the wind springs up, coming first in catpaws, then spreading over the surface until out at sea white-caps are to be seen. Then the small boats put up sail and edge in shore. Perhaps another salmon and sea bass are taken, the latter from the heart of an anchovy school where we saw him lying in state, surrounded by prospective food, and then we join the line, reel up, take a satisfying glance at the big salmon under the canvas, and run in shore, where all the inhabitants of Capitola appear to have come down to count the spoils, and soon the float is piled with the splendid fish, and the amateur fishermen climb the stairs to the high pier and tell the stories and have their salmon packed and shipped to friends who cannot go a-fishing. At Monterey a small army of Japanese have the professional salmon fisheries in hand. They fish from sailboats, and begin when the angler stops, requiring the strong west wind.

## *Off the Sierra Santa Cruz*

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When this arises the fleet sweeps down the bay often with the alignment of an army, covering every section of water where the salmon are liable to be found, and reaping a big daily harvest of large fish.

The bay is now covered with white-caps, the strong west winds bowling in big patches of high fog, the whistling buoy is complaining, and the day is over for salmon, at least off Soquel, and by one o'clock I am far up the winding river in the Santa Cruz range, where the odors of bay fill the air and the rich tints of giant sequoias paint the slopes in ever varying beauty and are in truth *semper virens*.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A NEW GAME FISH

**A**MONG the mysteries of the sea are the strange migrations of its inhabitants, the fishes, and the causes which influence them. The Pacific Coast of North America is peculiarly situated; swept by the Kuroshiwo, the so-called Black Current of Japan, an Asiatic Gulf Stream, its climate is tempered and modified so that the entire coast is much warmer than corresponding regions on the Atlantic coast, and it is constantly visited by strange and unexpected visitors from the sea. For ten years Santa Catalina Island has been famous for its tuna fishing; the big game has been taken with rod and reel, the author capturing the first very large fish, weighing one hundred and eighty-three pounds, which was followed by one taken by Col. C. P. Morehous, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, and the records of the Tuna Club to-day show about sixty of the fishes taken with rod and reel, weighing over one hundred pounds, and four or five one hundred and fifty pounds.

The tuna is remarkably fickle. As a general rule it comes in July, or the latter part of June, arriving in schools and remaining until August 15th, when it sud-

## *A New Game Fish*

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denly ceases biting and the season, so far as the sport is concerned, is at an end; yet the tunas are still on the ground. Up to this time they have been feeding on flying fishes, running them into the bays and out on the beaches, but now it will be found that they are feeding on squid and in deeper water.

These fishes evidently range from seventy-five to two hundred and fifty pounds, doubtless larger ones being in the schools. For two years past only small ones have been seen, and it is supposed that a large school of orcas drove them away, and tunas have been reported from Australia and other parts of the world where they have never been seen before. But suddenly, in the fall of 1904, a new fish arrived, a beautiful creature, an almost typical tuna, but not over sixty or seventy pounds in weight; a fish as trim and attractive as can be imagined.

It had the general shape of a tuna. The head was large, the back light olive green, in contradistinction to the blue-backed big tunas. The finlets, instead of pale yellow, as in the tuna, were a vivid lemon yellow; the side fins were a third longer than those of the typical tunas. The oldest inhabitant of the island, "Mexican Joe," who had been fishing its waters for twenty years, had never seen the fish, although the typical tuna has been known from the earliest times; indeed, I have found its bones in the mounds, showing that it was favorite game with the early inhabitants of the island.

## *Big Game at Sea*

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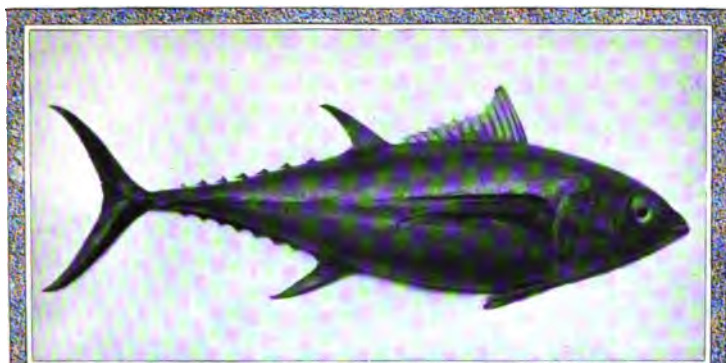
The fish was new to me, and upon sending a photograph to Dr. Jordan, he wrote me that the fish was a most interesting visitor, or as he put it, "one more bond which bound us to Japan," or words to that effect. The fish hitherto had been known only in the ports of Japan and rarely at Honolulu, but never had been reported from American shores. It is known to science as *Germo macropterus*, and is a species of albacore, a cousin of the tuna.\*

Having no common name, I called it the Japanese Albacore, and by any other name it would have been just as interesting; but the term was justified by the fact that it had been known for a long time in Japan. The fish so resembled the tuna that the boatman assumed that it was a tuna and called it the "yellow-finned tuna," by which name the interesting fish will go down to fame, and with some excuse, as when compared superficially to the tuna it resembles it much more than it does its generic relative. This was in 1904, and ever since the new tuna, with its vivid lemon finlets, has appeared every August or September in vast numbers, affording a sport never dreamed of, for the simple reason that, being smaller than the tuna, averaging about fifty pounds, they are much easier to catch.

The capture of the large and true tuna, the most difficult of all fishes (if in good condition) to catch, is an event even in Southern California, and out of thousands who have made the attempt there are not

\*Dr. Jordan now considers it a tuna. (*Thunnus macropterus*.)





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- (1) A New Game Fish—The Yellow-finned Tuna.  
(2) L. P. Streeter, with a Catch of a Yellow-finned Tuna.



## *A New Game Fish*

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over seventy anglers who wear the blue button of the Tuna Club, showing that they have taken a one-hundred-pound tuna or over with the rod, reel and line (21-thread line) specified by the Tuna Club. Many anglers have taken specimens weighing up to one hundred pounds and over in ten, fifteen or twenty minutes, some in five minutes (female fishes, exhausted by spawning), but the vigorous fish, the typical tuna of one hundred and fifty pounds, in its best condition, is more than a match for the average angler.

The tuna of large size is the exception; but the yellow-fin of fifty or sixty pounds, five hundred of which were caught last season, without question affords great sport and less real labor to the majority of anglers. One big tuna satisfies the soul of the average angler, but the fifty-pound yellow-fins, when played on the light thread-like line from one to two hours, have opened up a new field of sport.

The tuna and albacore are wandering fishes, found over wide areas. They move north and south with the seasons, appearing in the Pacific in spring or summer and leaving when the rains come, or in December or earlier, and sometimes do not come at all.

In August or September the fishing is at its best, and in the lee of the great island of Santa Catalina vast schools of yellow-tail, tuna, bonita and albacore congregate to prey upon the schools of small fry, sardines, anchovies, smelt and flying fishes, which are there to spawn in the shallow bays which form the

## *Big Game at Sea*

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mouths of cañons along shore. The bonitas and true tunas are on the surface, the latter often moving along in schools in an acute angle with a large tuna in the lead, fins and tail projecting above the surface, when it is an easy matter to cast a bait in front of them. Deeper, but not far from the surface, lies the albacore, and at times the big tuna, and almost invariably the "yellow-finned tuna," which in the rush upward after the prey is often the last, coming up out of the depths flashing white, green and gold scintillating with color, a radiant object.

The conditions on these Pacific fishing grounds are ideal. The island affords smooth water, though twenty or thirty miles out at sea the water is deep, blue as sapphire, the sky clear and bright, the temperature almost always cool and delightful, while the island with its high mountains, its rocky and precipitous cliffs affords a charming relief to the eye.

Slowly the launch with its comfortable seats in the stern moves along the kelp beds, the highway of the fishes, where groves and forests of giant weed rise in the deep blue water and roll and bend in the tide, forming halls and portières of great beauty through which countless fishes swim and poise.

Often the game is here; again off shore, where the sea is a vast sapphire, a blue so intense that it appears to be the very sky reflected in the waters. The line is out sixty feet or so and at the end of the long leader or snood a silvery sardine gleams and flashes

## *A New Game Fish*

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in the sunlight as it turns and quivers. In almost every direction the perfect mirror of the ocean is disturbed by schools of large fishes and no one can tell what the game may be. The air is cool and delicious, the only sound the cry of some distant gull or the harsher protest of a bald eagle chased by king birds and ravens. Off on the horizon is the perfect figure of a ship under sail, really a rock, and away to the east the snowy peaks of the Sierra Madre, ten or twelve thousand feet in air.

So attractive is the environment that one forgets the objective, until suddenly the tip of the rod bends, leaps downward, resilient, deadly. The reel sounds, blazoning a loud acclaim on the silent air, and you are aware that some marvelous thing has you, and despite your best and most conscientious efforts, is tearing away the thread-like line known as "number-nine," in yards, varas and feet. There is no stopping it. Your thumb stall plays gently on the line, and you can almost see it smoke, and smoke it might if you had not wet the line in advance. The slightest mistake, the least overpressure, and the game is up.

So you dally with the line, play with it, press your thumb gently upon it, as it sinks into the sea to the acclaim of the reel. If you are wise in your generation you will have marked your line with silk; red for one hundred feet, blue for two hundred feet, and yellow for three hundred feet and so on, as the fine cobweb-like line melts away, and—tell it not in Gath!

## *Big Game at Sea*

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—I lost nine hundred feet of this line once in Avalon Bay, which went off in one wild scream of the reel. There was a z-e-e—ee! dying slowly away, and an empty spool to tell the story, a burned thumb to illustrate the fierceness of the rush.

The line is going down at an angle of forty-five degrees. One hundred, two hundred, five hundred feet gone before you feel that the intensity of the rush is over. The slightest tension that you have been able to give has told, and up comes the game, the delicate line as taut as a guitar string. You have the butt in the cap of your belt, the slender tip of greenheart bending to the danger point. Any mistake will be fatal now, and you begin to reel with circumspection, watching for the rush which is sure to come sooner or later. But the unseen game is rising to the surface. The first wild bound on feeling the hook is over, and the fish is surging up, sending a peculiar thrill through the light rod and line, exhilarating to the angler perfectly attuned to the sport and the environment.

There is nothing quite like it, yet one has the time to observe the beauties of the place—its many charms. Nowhere is the water bluer, more deeply tinted with the ethereal splendor of the sky, for sky it seems, and as you look down into it, indigo, sapphire, Labradorite, all the blues you have seen or dreamed of flash across the mind, the blue of Byron, and——

“ Oh, darkly, deeply, beautifully blue,”

## *A New Game Fish*

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as somewhere someone sings about the sky, and as you gaze into the deep blue heart of the ocean to catch the first glimpse of this splendid game that is playing you so well, you see the strange, graceful, fairy-like denizens of the sea, forms of crystal of such dainty shape, so ethereal, that you look through some of them and see other forms far beyond. They drift by, radiant comets, chalices of seeming pearls, cloud-like traceries, shapes seemingly of the fancy, while everywhere are scattered gems, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, living gems, minute crustaceans known as sapphiræne, which take on this marvelous gift of iridescence and add to the splendors of the sea.

The ocean which looks so blue, so absolutely clear, is, on closer inspection, seen to be alive with countless myriads of shapes, and up through them comes your game. You see him first, a glint of silver far below, then green, and vivid lemon tints catch the sunlight, and up into or through this empyrean of the sea rises the game, a splendid fish, three or four feet long, with back of green, belly, as it turns upward, of silver, finlets of lemon yellow, eyes large, side fins, albacore-like, though not so long, but longer than in the tuna; the head is large, body robust, but graceful, a splendid type of fish, the *hirenaga* of Japan. Up it comes, dashing about the boat, trying, and successfully, to plunge; circling, darting this way and that, full of vigor, never giving up, though fighting every move of rod and reel; never had fish a fairer field; never

## *Big Game at Sea*

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was game caught on more honorable terms, as the slightest mistake will break the delicate rod; a jerk of any kind sever the web-like line.

Moments have slipped away during this play, and the fish that is now circling the boat, or swimming back and forth by it, always bearing off, has been contesting the reel for over an hour, yet is still strong. The relentless *click, click, click* continues, and the big reel brings it in until it is seen doggedly swimming along near the boat. Then you rally and have it on the quarter, the boatman sinks his gaff beneath it, jerks it into the silvery throat, and the gleaming, struggling *hirenaga* is held, beating the water furiously, to be hauled in and put out of its misery. It is needed as a trophy.

The fish doubtless runs up to nearly, if not quite, one hundred pounds, the largest taken with rod and reel of the Light Tackle Club being a sixty pounder, caught by Mr. A. J. Eddy. Mr. L. P. Streeter, president of the Aransas Pass Tarpon Club, in a conversation on the subject of the fighting qualities of this fish, said:

“My experience with the Japanese albacore, or ‘yellow-fin tuna,’ on the nine-thread line, under the rules of the Catalina Light Tackle Club, leads me to the belief that he is indeed fortunate who has the opportunity of capturing this grand game fish in the waters of Catalina.

“The difficulties attending its capture on light



## *A New Game Fish*

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tackle are such that if one out of every five tuna hooked is brought to gaff, the angler may consider his spurs won.

“ It has been my experience in landing eighteen on the nine-ounce rod, ranging from seventeen to fifty-one and one-fourth pounds, that the capture of the larger fish (those over forty pounds) can best be effected by chumming them around the boat, and this can be done only by the liberal use of chum—such as sardines, smelts or albacore cut up, which must be fresh, as salted bait is ignored by this fastidious fish.

“ When the chum is first thrown out the skip-jacks appear, then the albacore. At this stage of the game expectancy is keen—but wait; presently up from the unseen depths rises what appears to be a long bar of gold—it is a yellow fin. Now throw out a handful of chum away from that on which the albacore are feeding, and just as the tuna cuts the surface meet him with your bait, and the battle is on.

“ This seems very easy, but requires much experience and skill, as the slightest miscalculation finds you fast to an albacore; also the tuna passes the bait by, if he discerns its connection, which indicates a game fish of the highest order.

“ Most of these tunas (especially the large fish) make a brilliant surface fight, only sounding at times, it being very difficult to pump them up from any great depth, and instances where captures have been made

## *Big Game at Sea*

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of fish sounding much over eight hundred feet are rare.

“The delicacy of pressure required when these fish sound to a depth must be experienced to be appreciated; it is such as to preclude the use of a leather reel apron; only a knitted thumb stall is permissible.

“The general experience with the larger fish is a strike, then down he goes until your line has almost faded away; then a slight tremor comes up from below—you can now reel up and start anew; the tuna is off, also your tackle, which parts generally near the swivel.

“Those fish which do not immediately sound are off like a flash, the launch at full speed follows; sometimes the course will continue straight for a mile, often more, then they commence to swing in huge circles around the boat until the slowly closing circle causes them to sound.

“I have had this movement repeated twenty times in quick succession, on which occasion my boatman remarked, ‘You will never get that fish to sound.’ Happily he was wrong. The capture brought me my gold button. Here is an interesting point, namely, unless you can outrun the tuna, until circling ensues and he takes a notion to sound, your case is almost hopeless, as during a running battle the strain which it is possible to bring in action and not break a nine-thread line will not serve as a check for an instant, much less kill the fish; in fact, it is but a leading string.

## *A New Game Fish*

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"These tuna all surface when hooked at some stage of the fight; this appears to be a trait characteristic of the species, thus differentiating from the common albacore, which, when hooked, immediately sounds in all cases; they, however, are not to be considered for an instant in the same class.

"With light tackle the time required to bring a tuna of forty pounds or over to gaff has ranged from one to two hours."

It is conclusive, then, that a new factor in sea angling has appeared in these already remarkable waters; a new game fish ranging from twenty to seventy pounds or more; a game which combines the play of the albacore and the tuna, which makes in the larger fishes a surface play like the bonita, and has strength and power sufficient to give it high rank with the fine tackle which anglers now use with a view of giving the fish fair play. In one season over five hundred of these fishes were brought to gaff, most of them being released and not gaffed; and when it is considered that albacore, two kinds of bonitas, yellowtail and white sea bass, with barracuda and swordfish, are roaming these seas all at one time, some idea of the sport may be imagined.

Mr. L. P. Streeter, Secretary of the Tuna Club, took a large number of yellow-fin tunas in 1906, and made some interesting deductions as to the average time in bringing them to gaff on a 9-ounce rod and a nine-thread line.

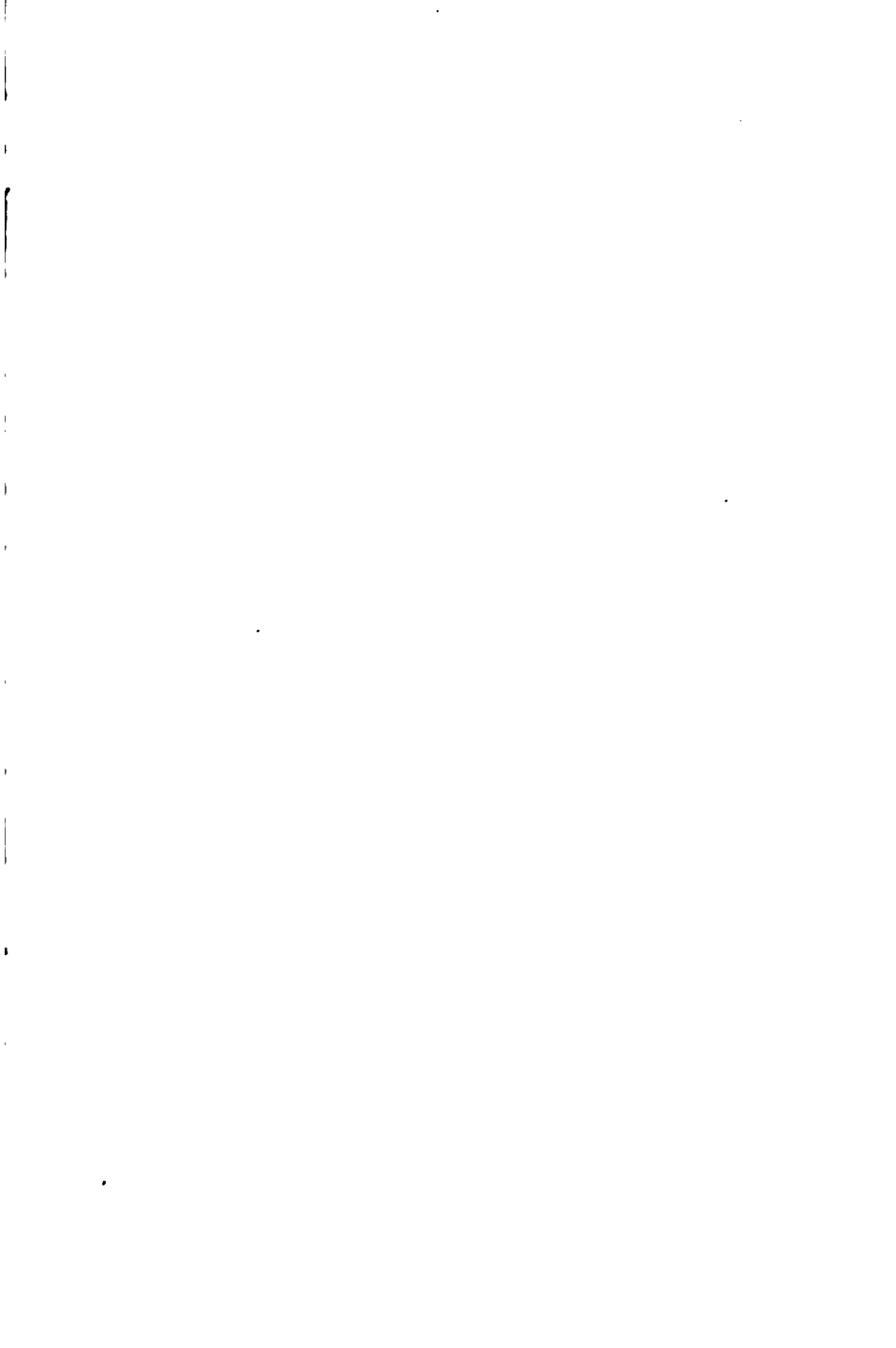
Fish 15 to 20 pounds: Four caught—average time 16 minutes. Fish 20 to 25 pounds: Seven caught—average time 32 minutes. Fish 25 to 30 pounds: Three caught—average time 1 hour. Note—This high average due to 1 hour 45 min-

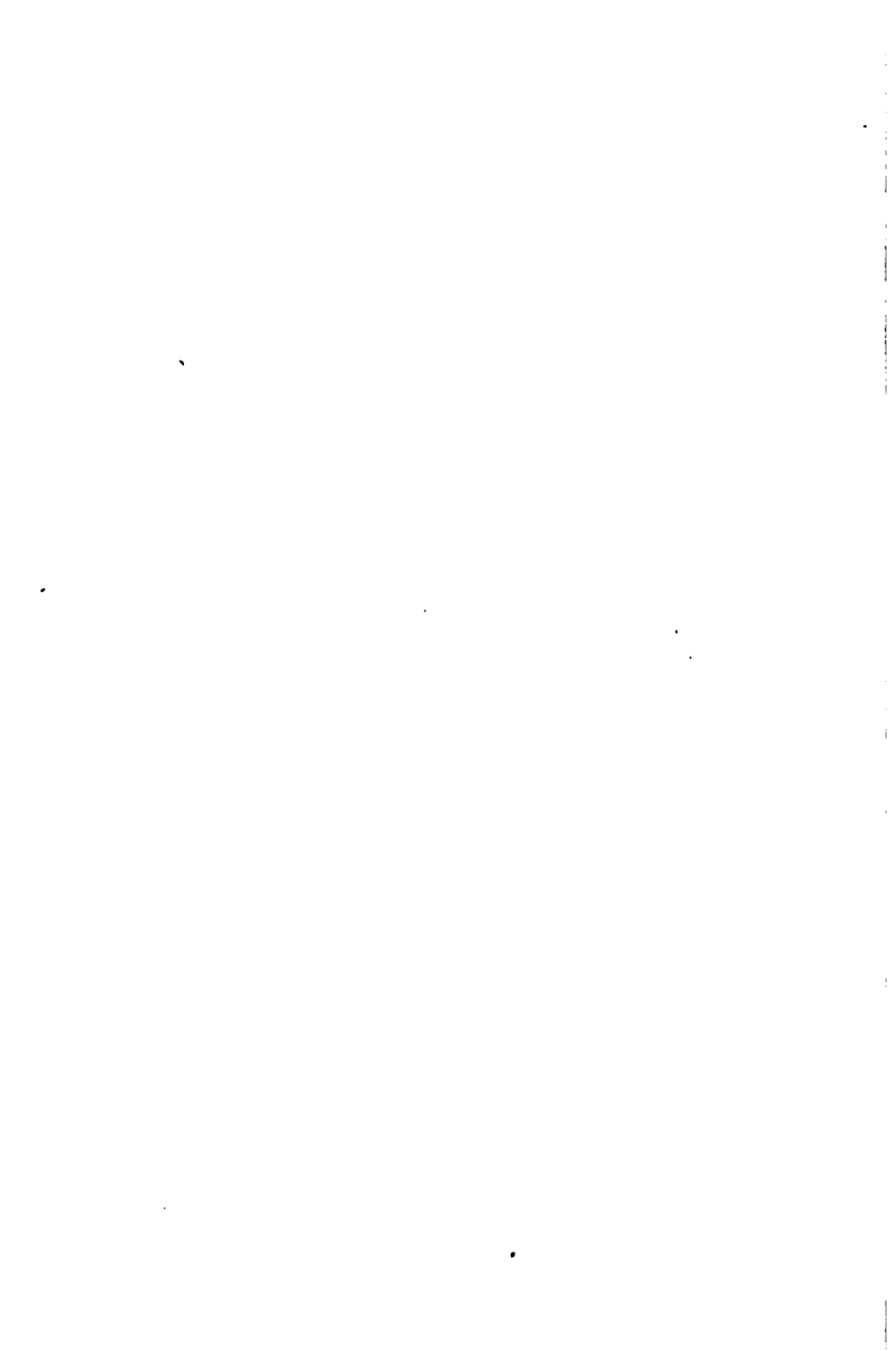
## *Big Game at Sea*

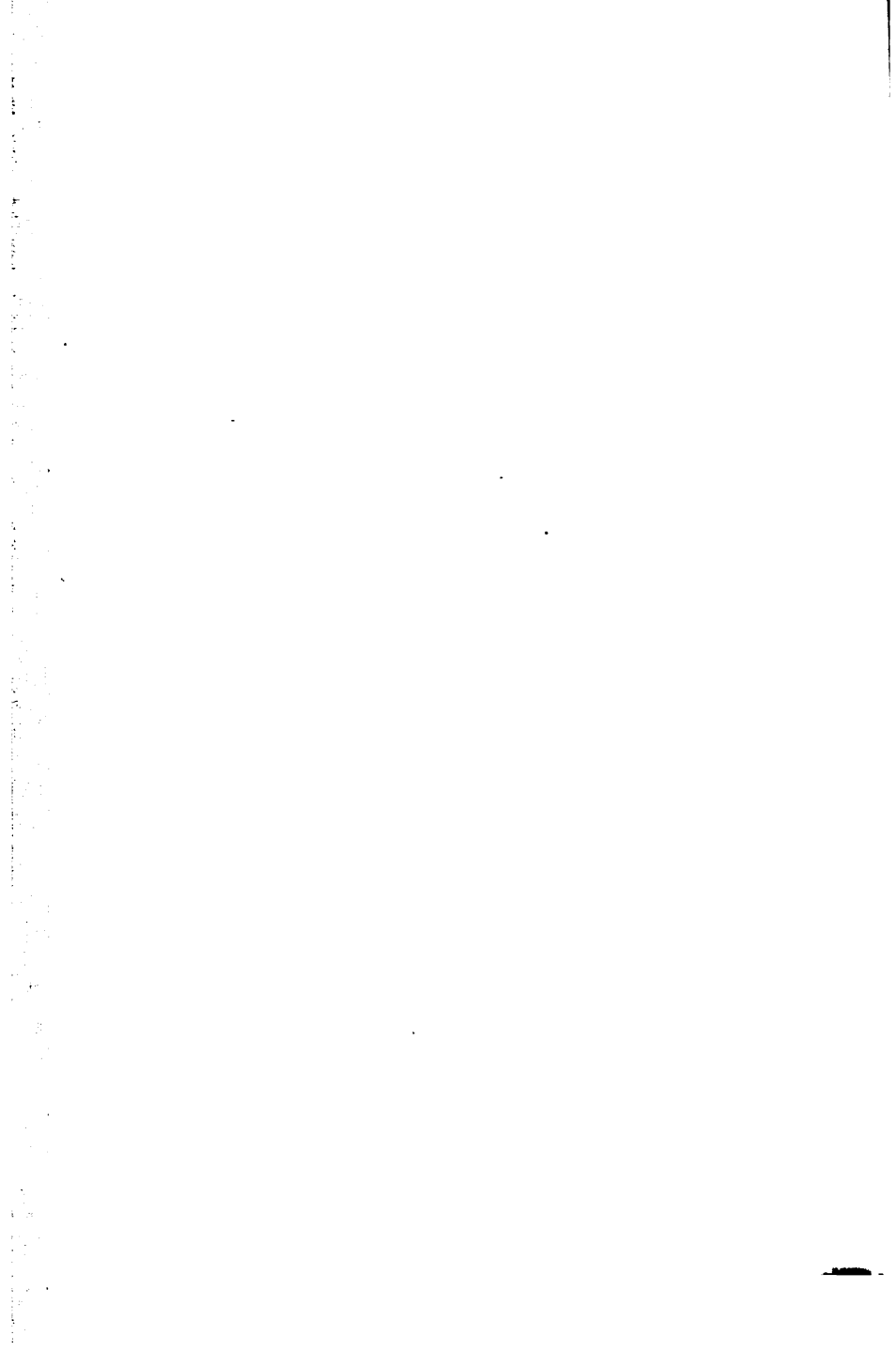
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utes charged against my first tuna (28lbs.) on light tackle. The average time of other two fish in this class was 50 minutes. Fish in 40-pound class: Two caught—39½ pounds and 40 pounds—average time 2 hours. Note—The 39½ pounds fish put up a very hard fight, lasting 2 hours and 30 minutes; he was a deep sounding fish. The 40½ pounds fish (Silver Button) put up a beautiful surface fight lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes. Fish in 50-pound class: One caught—51½ pounds (Gold Button). Note—A grand surface fight lasting 1 hour and 40 minutes, extending several miles; also he did not sound for fully an hour after the strike.











MAR 17 1962



